

Copyright

by

Katherine Lynn Turner

2008

The Dissertation Committee for Katherine Lynn Turner
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

The Musical Culture of *La Concezione*:
Devotion, Politics and Elitism in Post-Tridentine Florence

Committee:

Andrew Dell'Antonio, Supervisor

Katherine Arens

Rebecca Baltzer

Lorenzo Candelaria

Kelley Harness

Kimberlyn Montford

Luisa Nardini

The Musical Culture of *La Concezione*:
Devotion, Politics and Elitism in Post-Tridentine Florence

by

Katherine Lynn Turner, B.M.Ed., M.M.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
the University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2008

Acknowledgements

No project is possible in isolation. I am grateful to the many librarians, archivists and the collegial friends I met along the way. The kindness and generosity I received were immeasurably helpful—I only hope that someday I can be as wise and helpful to the next generation. Deserving special thanks are the fellows of the Medici Archive Project and Villa I Tatti in Florence.

I am indebted to Andrew Dell’Antonio, my dissertation advisor. He graciously pointed me in the right direction (and re-direction), offered sage advice, and helped with translations with more patience and humor than I surely deserved. Kimberlyn Montford made extraordinary efforts to be collegial and was unselfish in sharing her experience with ‘nun music,’ as was Kelley Harness; and Rebecca Baltzer and Luisa Nardini were kind enough to read and comment on several chapters. Despite all of their efforts, any mistakes are my own. For ease of reading, I have included my transcriptions in the footnotes and I have modernized spellings and dates except where noted.

A last note of appreciation is to my family, long supportive of my efforts, to Kim for therapeutic walks around the lake and to Ty for sharing the journey.

The Musical Culture of *La Concezione*:
Devotion, Politics and Elitism in Post-Tridentine Florence

Publication No.

Katherine Lynn Turner, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

Supervisor: Andrew Dell'Antonio

The musical culture of the female monastic institution called *La Concezione*, or *il monastero nuovo*, reflected the political, social and devotional objectives of the Medici court. In 1562, at the close of the Council of Trent, the convent was founded through the last testament of Grand Duchess Eleonora de Toledo de' Medici with the support of Grand Duke Cosimo I's personal knighthood—the *Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*. Glorified as a “reformed” institution reflecting the piety of Florence and the rectitude of the Medici family, the public image of the convent required strict adherence to Catholic Reformation ideals of female virtue. Musically, the women of the convent restricted their public performance to monophonic chant. The only universally approved music for monastics, chant was thought to be the most appropriate form of public musical devotion for the virginal daughters of the court. In private, the patrician women perhaps enjoyed the popular polyphonic music that the vast resources of their families, the Florentine court,

and their superiors, afforded them. The public image of perfection was of the utmost importance to the Medici; polyphonic performance was only allowed in the most private spaces of the cloister—away from the public eyes and ears.

A counter-example to recent scholarship, this view of female monastic music is in contrast to studies that have highlighted examples of wealthy convents that actively sought opportunities for polyphonic performance as part of their public character. This dissertation relies on various extant archival documents of the convent, the Order of Santo Stefano and the Medici family in an examination of the role that music played in both the public and private spheres of the most elite convent of early modern Florence.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Monastic Institutions in Early Modern Italy	3
Music Performed, Composed and Heard in Convents	11
La Concezione	21
The Medici Family and La Concezione	25
Convent Documents	31
Chapter Synopses	34

Chapter One, Abiding by Trent: Contradictions and Realities 37

The Council of Trent and Music	38
Council of Trent and Women	47
Forced Monachization	63
Applying Trent to La Concezione	71

Chapter Two, The Political Alliance of La Concezione and the Order of Santo Stefano 100

The Political Affiliation of Santo Stefano and La Concezione	113
Convents as an Extension of the Court	126
Women and Convents as Political Strategy	137

Chapter Three, The Music of the Medici Court and the Order of Santo Stefano 143

Music at the Court of the Medici	144
The Order of Santo Stefano and Music	149
Outside Musical Influences at La Concezione	158

Chapter Four, Music and Community
at La Concezione 167

Daily Life	175
Rituals	198
Divine Offices	201
Ferial Sung Masses	211
Funerals	212
Feasts	214
Monastic Rites	218
Initiation	219
Profession	225
Officer Induction	230
Procession	231

Chapter Five, Image Formation:
Private versus Public Spaces 237

Image Formation	239
The Superiors	243
Local Authorities	246
Prominent Families	250
Art and Architecture	255
Inhabitants	260

Conclusions 266

Bibliography 273

Vita 294

Introduction

In the first twenty-one years of its existence, the post-Tridentine convent of *La Concezione* swelled to triple its allotted number of sisters with an increasing number of daughters from the first families of Florence, their ladies and their servants. They came to join aunts and cousins in a convent known for its patrician standards, isolationism and conservative public image. The only sounds heard by passersby were the bells that rang throughout the day and perhaps the occasional Psalm or litany; subdued were the sumptuous performances by well-rehearsed sisters that could be heard at other wealthy convents— only the ancient chants were practiced in this chapel.

From the outside, this convent— still called *il monastero nuovo*— was an extension of the court; reflecting power and wealth, it was the seat of Medicean virtue and the perfect image of religious reform and renewal. On the inside, however, it was a world populated and managed nearly exclusively by patrician women. The inhabitants and the privileged female relatives who visited had a shared understanding— one of noble birth, feminine piety, advanced education, refined tastes and extensive resources. The music absent from the chapel was not forbidden in private amongst women.

In an essay dedicated to championing the musical culture of early modern women, Suzanne Cusick discusses the ethos of female performers, patrons and listeners as “a gynecentric musical world.”¹

Music-making enabled women to avoid the perils of idleness, to perform both modesty and social grace, and to focus the desires of their soul toward praise of the “Universal Creator,” and of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven... [the performing women] lead their listeners from lower to higher states of consciousness while they themselves seem to perform undeniable signs of the pre-eminent female virtue, modesty.²

¹ Suzanne G. Cusick, “Epilogue: Francesca Among Women, a ‘600 Gynecentric View,” in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin LaMay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 426.

² *Ibid.*, 434.

She describes a space populated almost entirely by women, where music and music-making were not simply pleasurable pastimes or even merely a means of self-expression— rather, they embodied the quintessential feminine virtues of *modesty*, *industry*, *graciousness* and *devotion* to Mary, the Queen of Heaven. It was understood by the inhabitants of this world that music and devotion were inextricably linked—the very purpose of music was to offer praise to the heavens.

The “parallel universe” that Cusick describes, where women live, work and pray together in a flurry of musical activity, is not in fact a description of one of Florence’s convents— although it well could be. She is describing Bronzini’s treatise *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne*, a humanist dialogue that exalted the worthiness and virtues of women, specifically, those of the 1620s female-led court of Florence. With a thriving intellectual and musical culture that embraced performers such as Francesca Caccini and Tarquinia Molza, the Medici regents Maria Maddalena of Austria and Christina of Lorraine exercised their patronage of literature, art and music in order to exert their right to rule.³ Cusick suggests that Bronzini’s text “envisioned music as a kind of knowledge embodied in female form that servant and sovereign women alike could use to intervene benevolently in human souls and political relationships.”⁴ Based on shared knowledge and experience, the women of the court sought a musical outlet not for vanity or unscrupulous notoriety but as a means of sustaining and reinforcing positive female modesty and restraint. According to Bronzini’s description of the perfect female

³ See also Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women’s Voices: Music, Art, and female Patronage in Modern Florence* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁴ Cusick, “Epilogue,” 432.

attributes, the secular women's musical practices he describes closely mirrored those approved by authorities for monastic women: music ideally existed as a means of enhancing devotion while marginalizing idle hands and idle throats; a woman should not pride herself as a professional musician but should humbly serve with her voice rather than with her pen; song, particularly in certain modes, was prized over instruments; and class was no barrier to musical observance. Even as Bronzini wrote of women's attributes, musical and otherwise, two Medici princesses, the daughters of the regents no less, lived in female monastic institutions—the archetypical “gynecentric world.”

Monastic Institutions in Early Modern Italy

Convents and monasteries were inescapable institutions in Florence from the Middle Ages until the turn of the nineteenth century; they were an important part of the civic structure, not only because of the men and women who lived there and the chapels in which they worshipped, but also because religious institutions were regarded with immense respect as essential contributors to everyday life.⁵ Many were considered places of pilgrimage and houses of refuge or lodging for travelers; processions during religious feasts as well as secular feasts such as weddings often included a stop at the local religious house—convents in particular. Such observances were opportunities for the enclosed inhabitants to glimpse the outside world and feel a part of the festivities; they

⁵ The terms “convent” and “monastery” were flexible in the early modern era (ca.1500-ca.1800) and did not conform to the modern gendered terms. Although La Concezione was a “monastero” by name, I will use “convent” to refer to any female religious institution.

were also opportunities for the citizens to pay homage to the women who prayed for their protection.

The significance of religious institutions is well documented in memoirs and travel guides that reinforce their presence and importance in society. Large and small, convents were attached to local churches in every neighborhood in every quarter of Florence and scattered outside the city walls and in the countryside as they were elsewhere in Europe; they ranged from the exceptionally wealthy to those that relied on the charity of the community. Today, there are myriad edifices still on the city map that were once dedicated to housing religious daughters, a few still used for their original purpose.

In the early modern era, female religious were commonplace; everyone would have known a woman living in a convent. This was due in large part to the entrenched dowry system; it was very expensive to marry off a daughter, so many families chose instead to send some or all of their daughters to live in convents.⁶ These daughters were not forgotten by their families—letters, gifts, and visits were common forms of communication.⁷ Even after rules of strict enclosure, or *clausura*, were enacted during the

⁶ A dowry, whether secular or sacred, was paid by a woman's family and constituted her share of the family inheritance. A well-researched topic, dowry trends provide information about economic changes as well as social mobility. See P. Renee Baernstein, "In the Widow's Habit: Women between Convent and Family in Sixteenth-Century Milan," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25/4 (Winter 1994): 787-807; Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), Chapter 3, "Nuns and Dowry Funds"; Trevor Dean and Kate Lowe, *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁷ For example, on 11 November 1627, Maria Cristina de' Medici sent a letter from La Concezione to her aunt Caterina de' Medici in Siena thanking her for a gift of "quantiere" (trays) and in return, sent Caterina some "santi," probably images of unspecified saints. ASF MP 6108, f.706, dated 1627 11 11. Documentary Sources for the Arts and Humanities, Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID# 6336.

sixteenth century, church authorities still permitted limited interaction with immediate family members.⁸

In addition to the financial incentive to send a girl to a convent, a more powerful motivation was perhaps at work in the family's decision: the sole vocation of a religious woman was to pray to God for the protection of her family, her city and all of Christendom. The blessings believed to have come from their sacrifice were critical to the women on the inside and their families on the outside. Women who dedicated their life to the church were considered the 'brides of Christ,' a title reflected in the vestment ceremonies during which girls gave themselves to their heavenly bridegroom, and as such, they held a place of respect in the community and as members of their families.⁹

Over the course of a day, cloistered sisters recited the eight short services of the Daily Office; this was in addition to daily lessons that were read aloud, devotional hymns that were sung, and regular celebrations of the Mass. In this way, nuns dedicated much of their energy to prayer and devotion—a facet of their lives not quickly forgotten by the families that enclosed them within the convent walls.

⁸ For a discussion of the cloister and its effect on traditions, see Silvia Evangelisti, "'We Do Not Have it, and We Do Not Want It': Women, Power and Convent Reform in Florence," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34/3 (2003): 677-700; Mary Laven, "Cast Out and Shut In: The Experience of Nuns in Counter-Reformation Venice," in *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Pre-Modern Italy*, ed. Stephen J. Milner, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Gabriella Zarri, "Gender, Religious Institutions and Social Discipline: The Reform of the Regulars," in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London: Longman, 1998).

⁹ The role of the "bride of Christ" is discussed in Silvia Evangelisti, "Wives, Widows, and Brides of Christ: Marriage and the Convent in the Historiography of Early Modern Italy," *Historical Journal* 43/1 (2000): 233-47; Kate Lowe, "Secular Brides and Convent Brides: Wedding Ceremonies in Italy during the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation," in *Marriage in Italy 1300-1600*, eds. Trevor Dean and Kate Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

The women who lived in convents came from every faction of life, from the wealthiest princess to the illegitimate girl turned prostitute. While during the Middle Ages, there had been a variety of living arrangements, by the sixteenth century, most female religious lived in groups in a space that was separated from secular life. No single term is comprehensive enough to describe all of these individuals because the status and title of a woman was largely based on her secular caste. *Monaca* has several meanings; the English translation “nun” does not adequately describe the many classifications of women who lived in religious institutions. A *corista*, *velata* or *professa* was a woman who never married but rather paid a *dote spirituale* to the church and took the solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Such an individual was called a “first order” sister and she most often lived in a cloistered community; common titles in reference to her included *Suora* and *Donna* (the latter particularly referred to wealthy sisters) After her initial investiture ceremony, the young woman probably spent about a year as a *novizia*, or novice, learning the customs of the religious life with few or no rights to participate in activities such as voting on convent matters. Following the introductory period, she participated in the veiling ritual and took her final vows. After several years as a junior member of the community, a *giovane* with limited rights that probably did not allow her to run for office, she reached full status and was considered a senior member of the community at about the age of twenty-five. Elder sisters of the community could be called *Madre*; other titles included that of *Maestra*, used for those holding most offices, except the administrative positions (*Vicaressa*, *Priora*) and the highest office, that of *Abbadessa*. Other sisters called *converse* were servant nuns; coming from the lower

social classes, they were sometimes personal servants to wealthy professed sisters or they worked for the convent at large. Converse often paid a small or no dowry, as did women outside the traditional enclosed convent.

Third-order sisters, called “tertiaries” often took only simple vows and usually worked as nurses or in other types of charity in an open community where they could come and go – although they could be enclosed, as was increasingly the case after the fifteenth century. Open communities were considered institutions of lesser social standing in some regions but were an important component of the community’s structure. Some women lived in their family’s home but wore a habit and took vows, a practice that disappeared slowly between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. In Venice, there were *Casa de Zitale* for *convertite* (reformed prostitutes, desperate women) and the famed *Ospedali Grandi* where orphaned girls sometimes lived their entire lives in a status somewhere between religious daughters and secular women.¹⁰ Asylums and respites for pilgrims were often run by female religious, some who took vows, some who were laywomen. The work done by laywomen cannot be underestimated— widows who did not wish to remarry or were in the process of doing so, children and women in need of shelter, even married women sometimes worked and prayed alongside their sisters, often for the rest of their lives, as if they themselves had taken vows.

The convent represented an honorable alternative to marriage and was more acceptable for a woman than living in a state of danger in which her virginity could be

¹⁰ Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes, *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations 1525-1855* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

called into question (in the case of maidens preparing to marry), or her respectability (in the case of married women or widows). Young girls were often educated in convents—they were called *educande* or *serbanze* and their time in the convent could last from a few months to many years. Running a school was a source of income for the sisterhood and such institutions provided girls with quality lessons in reading, writing, music, sometimes book keeping skills; always they were taught the virtues necessary for an honorable life.¹¹

Women in early modern convents were a symbol of a city's devotion and a family's sacrifice — they served as role models for female piety in times of political turmoil or religious upheaval. The fervor of reform, fueled by the Council of Trent, encouraged the populace to engage in a variety of activities as part of apposite faith. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the patrician class excelled in devotional practices that displayed both their piety and their financial status; by building grand chapels in their homes, they employed priests, artists, and musicians who proclaimed through their writings, altar depictions, performances and compositions the glory that God had bestowed upon their family. One result of the building and creative frenzy was an explosion of new convents, monasteries, churches and confraternities, as well as the music and art that often accompanied their foundation and continued operation.

Only in recent decades have the women of religious institutions been a viable field of study. Long thought to be fruitless subjects of investigation because of their

¹¹ Sharon T. Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence," in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead (New York: Garland, 1999), 3-46.

seeming isolation and lack of overt power within the community, nuns (beyond a few rare exceptions) were ignored by scholars. As feminist methodology and an interest in the lives of historical women gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, women in the service of God emerged not only as viable subjects of study but as an abundant source of a wide range of information from sexual politics to familial relations to shifts in local economic trends.

The study of Italian nuns as women dedicated to devotion, community activism, empowerment, intellect and creativity between the late Middle Ages and the nineteenth century became popular in the late 1980s and 1990s, due in large part to the work of Gabriella Zarri, an early proponent of the scholarly value of early modern convents.¹² Through a wide array of archival sources such as account books, personal diaries, necrologies, formal requests to officials, as well as printed materials like ecclesiastic mandates, guidebooks and dedicatory prefaces, the lives and struggles of individual sisters and whole populations are being uncovered to the great benefit of the scholarly community. The religious sisters of some Italian cities have proved to be quite accessible—the archives of Venice, Rome, Naples, Milan and Florence have each yielded formidable contributions to the field.¹³ At the same time, most individual

¹² While her works are many, including several books and conference proceedings for which she has served as editor, the following are her seminal monographs: “Monasteri femminili e città (secoli XV-XVIII),” in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 9: La Chiesa e il potere politico dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea*, eds. G. Chittolini and G. Miccoli (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 359-429; *Le sante vive: cultura e religiosità femminile nella prima età moderna* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990); *Recinti: donne, clausura e matrimonio nella prima età moderna* (Bologna, Il mulino, 2000).

¹³ See P. Renee Baernstein, *A Convent Tale: A Century of Sisterhood in Spanish Milan*. New York: Routledge, 2002; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life, 1450-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University

convents and many cities have not yet benefited from scholarly research. The particular approach of each researcher varies widely from political and social history, gendered architecture, power wielded through mysticism, asceticism, and acts of artistic creation in and through convents.

Art historians in particular have made great strides in understanding how enclosed women used their community and personal resources to commission art works for chapels, altars, personal spaces and communal areas.¹⁴ By investigating the dedications, coats of arms, and subject matter of convent art, historians have concluded that women in convents were not idle observers of their cities; they were active participants in cultural movements, especially the well-educated women of wealthy convents. Like art, theatrical productions enacted by the inhabitants left documentation which has been used to discover the ways that women learned and entertained.¹⁵ However, like music, many aspects of performance went unrecorded and are now lost to time.

Press, 2007); Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth Century Neapolitan Convents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); K. J. P. Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jutta Giesela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁴ See E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, eds., *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Craig A. Monson, ed., *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Anabel Thomas, *Art and Piety in the Female Religious Communities of Renaissance Italy: Iconography, Space, and the Religious Woman's Perspective* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Francesca Toffolo, "Art and the Conventual Life in Renaissance Venice: The Monastery Church of Santa Caterina de' Bardi" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2005); Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University of Cambridge, 1996).

¹⁵ Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Music Performed, Composed and Heard in Convents

The musical culture of any early modern female monastic institution encountered a complex web of dispensations and prohibitions. A convent with a rich musical component was most likely one located in a prosperous city with civic leaders who enjoyed the arts at court and professed sisters from families willing and able to support music making with instruments, books, teachers and patronage. Additionally, convent musical culture was dependent upon the tolerance of music by local ecclesiastical superiors, which ranged from tacit acceptance to overt encouragement. Rules and regulations established by or for the convent were themselves a balance of stated decree and local tradition; to complicate matters, current research suggests that even strict prohibitions against certain instruments, styles or practices appears to have been largely ignored either blatantly or in secret by many female monastic communities.

The study of the music of Italian convents has been the topic of no fewer than four book-length studies since the mid-1990s.¹⁶ Craig Monson's 1995 work in Bologna coined the phrase "Disembodied Voices" to represent the apparent disconnect between the sounds that were heard and the faces and the bodies that were hidden. Focusing largely on the unusual nun-composer Lucrezia Orsina Vizzana and her printed motet

¹⁶ See Robert L. Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Craig A. Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Kimberlyn Montford, "Music in the Convents of the Counter-Reformation Rome" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1999); Colleen Reardon, *Holy Concord Within Sacred Walls: Nuns and Music in Siena, 1575-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

collection *Componimenti musicali* (1623) and a controversy of musical intrigue, Monson convincingly argues that external forces did in fact have an influence on the cloistered inhabitants. The history of this one Bolognese convent included not only a published composer, but also a long-standing quarrel with reform-minded archbishops like Gabriele Paleotti, a vicious battle between factions within the convent over the choir, and the sisters' efforts to continue the Consecration rite banned by the reform of the regulars. The groundbreaking theme of his monograph is that women thought to be powerless and disenfranchised cared deeply about the fate of their community and the music they employed as part of their devotional and social practices; the women, although enclosed, showed great determination, creativity and intellect throughout their internal and external struggles in an effort to preserve their way of life.

Robert Kendrick expanded the field to include the music of the nuns of Milan who faced significant obstacles to their musical aspirations by way of Carlo Borromeo, the strict reformist who took exception to sisters' insistence that music was beneficial. Kendrick presented the women of Milanese convents as "Celestial Sirens," heavenly voices from above that represented all that was contemptuous about 'brides of Christ' who used their bodies and voices so fervently. His work on the Milanese nuns included four nun-composers, the most famous of whom was Chiara Margarita Cozzolani, and works they may have composed for specific rites or feasts; additionally, Kendrick focuses on pieces dedicated to the nuns and the layers of meaning associated with such works. The chapters of the book are connected by the on-going narrative of the enclosed women's ability to combat attempts to reform convent policies, polyphonic music in

particular, by a series of archbishops whose opinions on music spanned the political gamut.

Kimberlyn Montford's 1999 dissertation examines convents' music performance and education in the wake of Trent in Rome, the very seat of reform. She provides a social context for Roman convents—which, as might be expected, were many, and highly invested in the changes being enacted across Europe. Her discussion of the reforms of the Council of Trent illuminate the ways in which the decrees affected perceptions about music: there was no straight line between pre- and post-Trent practices as many convents submitted, and were , requests for exemption. Often, the exceptions were sponsored by the very officials who were supposed to enforce the reforms. Montford explores Roman musical styles through three examples providing context for nuns who were well known for their singing and playing. Female monastics of this city circumvented strict clausura in order to maintain their musical foundation built on an ancient ritual of consecration within the context of a citywide celebration—the allusions in the music were used to reinforce positive images of a strong woman of God.

In contrast to the conflict created by musical and monastic reforms in some cities, Colleen Reardon introduced a divergent viewpoint in 2001 with a study of Sienese nuns whose musical efforts were actually encouraged by the local secular and church authorities. As no music created *by* the nuns is extant, she focused instead on a few pieces of music composed *for* the nuns, particularly one written for the vestment of a Chigi daughter. These pieces provide a context for the production and reception of the music of female monastics both in everyday life and for special occasions. The three main rituals

prove to be fertile ground for investigating Sieneese convents' relationship with the local governance and aristocratic families in the complex politics of devotion. As Reardon argues, activism and patronage by family members left ample evidence of the importance of kinship beyond the walls and the ways that families continued to be involved with their cloistered daughters, sisters and cousins.

No monograph addressing Florentine convent music has been presented to date. Perhaps due to the sheer number of institutions or the vast array of political changes that faced Florence, few musicologists have ventured to Florentine convents in search of musical histories. One who has done so on a limited scale is Kelley Harness.¹⁷ She has made a foray into the music of Florentine convents with two chapters in her book *Echoes of Women's Voices: Music, Art, and female Patronage in Early Modern Florence*. Chapters Seven and Eight examine the Regent and dowager Grand Duchess Christina of Lorraine's legacy as a patron of both music and convents. The duchess and her daughters were musical patrons of the Dominican convent of Santa Croce, called *La Crocetta*. An early sixteenth-century house founded by Domenica da Paradiso, it had a fascinating social and political history even before it became intertwined with the Medici family. Between the 1590s and 1650, the sisters of La Crocetta, which, during the 1620s and 1630s, included the princess Maria Magdalena, engaged in musical and theatrical activities for their ritual and devotional practices as well as for entertainment. As the community expanded their musical offerings to include more and more polyphony, and

¹⁷ Harness, *Echoes*, 209-343.

as they hired outside musicians for that purpose, the sisters became known as part of the image of power and rightful rule associated with the Medici female regents.

Each of these authors have investigated the music of religious women during roughly the same timeframe but in different cities; the combined result is that there was no uniform sound or shape of musical culture in early modern convent but that polyphony played an important role in molding the lives of the women and the larger community. The Council of Trent is often considered the turning point for reform; however, it is equally true that restrictions against music were enacted in some cities long before the Council met and in other cities, the decrees were taken as mere suggestions. What was banned as excess by one authority was lauded by another and what was considered profane by one superior was the embodiment of female devotion across the peninsula. The only consensus is that the women of Milan, Bologna, Rome, Siena and La Crocetta felt that music was a positive element in their lives and they were willing to take extreme measures in order to ensure its continued practice.

For each convent, in each city, “music” included not only activities secluded inside the cloister but also performance from the public areas— the parlor and the exterior chapel. Just as sound traversed the iron grates of the choir, music reached the cloister from the other side of the walls— festivities, parades, street songs and funeral dirges, incidental sounds such as vendors calling their wares, animals, warfare and the constant markers of time— the church bells. The proportion of “music” to “sound” depended on the type of convent, its location and its inhabitants.

When discussing the music and other cultural productions of female religious it is

important to keep in mind that although many, if not all, convents probably engaged in some musical activities, these may have been limited to oral tradition and therefore have left little specific trace. When the sisters sang monophonic chants as part of the services, it was considered an appropriate use of music; however, polyphony became a contentious issue almost as soon as communities of women began to perform it. There are more decrees, laws, bans and assaults on convents over polyphony than almost any other issue (although the most important ban and most frequent reprimand had to do with *clausura*). Most female houses probably sang or chanted the Daily Office in a manner similar to that of the male houses, and a reasonable assumption can be made that simple songs such as *laude* were used in informal gatherings, during work hours or for private devotion in one's cell. Beyond this, musical production was a matter of certain factors that either encouraged music to burgeon as nourishing to the soul or discouraged it as dangerous noise that promoted worldly desires.

It is known that many convents provided music during the Mass, either chanting or singing polyphonic Psalms, *laude* and motets or even performing instrumental music. As part of worship, this could range from organ accompaniments, preludes, and short interludes such as *toccatas* that were improvised and served to fill spaces of time or ceremonial functions like Communion; also possible were the more formal pieces for instruments such as *sonate da chiesa* and works for concerted forces. Particularly between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, many communities of religious women displayed their musical talents as a means of gaining respect in the community, thus encouraging donations or they performed music simply to enhance the devotional ethos

of their church.¹⁸

Additional instances in which music took on a special role in the lives of nuns were the three ceremonies pivotal to becoming a nun. Each contained music to a different extent depending on the girl, the family, the convent, and contemporary political and social circumstances. The first rituals was the novitiate ceremony, during which a young girl exchanged her secular dress for the convent robe; followed by the profession ceremony when she officially professed her vows; and the rarer consecration ceremony during which the nuns over twenty-five years of age were further venerated as holy virgins. Documentation indicates that the participant(s) of such ceremonies sang Psalms or responsaries as part of the event, that the new family of sisters may have sung or played— and most decadently, it was common in some places for families to hire musicians (local male singers and instrumentalists) to play during the ceremony or for the parade leading to the convent and the party afterwards in a manner that was strikingly similar to wedding festivities.¹⁹

In addition to whatever music the sisters themselves contributed in the public church for the Mass, Offices and ceremonies, private devotion and work songs that were probably common in small, remote or poor houses may have been supplemented in large, urban or wealthy houses with music that functioned as entertainment. Some convents had a rich tradition of theater that included not only reading printed plays, but also acting

¹⁸ Each of the following authors posited that convents used music either to enhance their standing in the community, to strengthen ties with patrons or because they felt that performing music added to the devotional climate of the convent; Baade, Harness, Hathaway, Kendrick, Monson, Montford, and Reardon.

¹⁹ See for example Monson, *Disembodied Voices*, 184-88, 216-17.

them out in costume and even having the nuns write their own material.²⁰ These (mostly) sacred plays had musical accompaniment or even intermedii-like pieces in the sixteenth century; such dramatic offerings as well as other, purely musical events were performed by the sisters in the parlors for the enjoyment of guests (or vice versa).²¹

Large civic functions and prominent convent rituals gave individual institutions an opportunity to display their musical prowess to the community and visitors beyond the regular chapel attendees. Examples include royal or dignitary visits and most significantly, the *anni santi* held every quarter century in Rome. Such grand displays included fireworks that accompanied nun performances on special feast days of these most important years when the public was invited, even encouraged, to attend.²²

The civic authorities had great influence on a convent as mandated by the Council of Trent. If the local authorities did not allow music, as some did not, particularly after the reforms of Trent, musical communities had to disband their forces, hide their music making or become adept at bending the rules. Many documents illuminate the ways in which communities of women adapted to new rules; often they asked for exceptions or applied other interpretations of the rulings given to them. There are cases of nuns moving organs so they could be better heard in the church, or sitting closer to the windows than strictly necessary, for example. Convent records across regional and class lines are full of instances where the spirit of the rule, if not the letter, was slightly askew or altogether

²⁰ A rich source of theatrical performances, convents were known not only for their patrons, audiences, actresses and playwrights, but also for breaking rules forbidding wigs, men's clothes and props. See Weaver, *Convent Theatre*.

²¹ For intermedii and musical performances within plays see Weaver, *Convent Theatre*, 70-76, 113-114.

²² Monson, *Disembodied Voices*, 186-89 describes convent rites and their similarities to secular weddings.

broken.²³

The emphasis on rules and restrictions against religious women making music was bound up in the issue of clausura. Feminized music, like the bodies creating it, was to be protected from both outside affect and public consumption. High walls, bricked in windows and iron grates were thought to insulate convents from secular influences and to prevent exposing the sisters to the public. This meant that for the most part, popular trends in fashion, art, music and literature were restricted from the sisters' milieu. Without such influences, how could women in convents contribute to the ever changing and evolving musical and cultural scene of their city? In fact, there may have been some ways that clausura actually encouraged artistic production. One fear of the authorities (and perhaps men in general) was that music would be the demise of the spiritual daughter, and perhaps the downfall of the city. Women projecting sound, using their bodies, their voices, arms, legs and mouths playing instruments, was a dangerous proposition. In which case, how did enclosure encourage music? A cloister offered protection—a grate and a wall offered the sound of angels without the physical entanglements of a sexed body. The “disembodied voice” describes music that was made inside but heard and revered outside; this solved, or at least lessened, the problem of physicality. In doing so, nuns could be of great service to a city's devotional climate by providing beautiful praise.

²³ While illustrations of musical infractions can be found in the work of Monson especially, Weaver provides theatrical examples and non-artistic instances (many having to do with clausura, or lack thereof) can be found in the works of Strocchia, Evalgesti and Gill, among others.

Several memoirs (largely from English travelers) remark as to the unseen “angelic” voices that represented the very best of a city’s piety.²⁴ The music was heard from the public exterior chapel that was connected to the nuns’ walled off interior (this configuration is often called the ‘double church’ structure).²⁵ Such churches were often important stops during processions. Civic pride was displayed in the gathering of the mass of parishioners appearing before the convent; before battle, troops would stop at the convent’s chapel in order to be musically emboldened; and dignitaries could be honored there— notable examples of this last category include Cristina the Queen of Sweden in the *anno santo* 1675 and Christina of Lorraine in 1589 Florence during her wedding festivities.²⁶

Each convent was a product of its time, location, status and mission— its musical culture was formed to reflect these factors. In Florence, in the years following the Council of Trent, the ruling Medici family sought to govern over all of the city’s monasteries and convents so that each institution would represent the city both publicly, through civic participation, and privately, through prayer and intercession on behalf of

²⁴ Travel journals such as Thomas Coryate’s *Coryat’s Crudities; Hastily Gobled Up in Five Moneths Travells in France, Savoy, Italy, Rhetia Commonly Called the Grisons Country, Helvetia Alias Switzerland, Some Parts of High Germany and the Netherlands; Newly Digested in the Hungry Aire of Odcombe in the County of Somerset, and Now Dispersed to the Nourishment of the Travelling Members of This Kingdome* (Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1905); as well as Italian diarists such as Tinghi provide many of the contemporary descriptions of convents; see Angelo Solerti, *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla Corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637* (New York: B. Blom, 1968).

²⁵ The double-chapel configuration was from the Medieval period but was favored by Borromeo for its clear separation of the sisters from the public. Baernstein, *A Convent Tale*, 87; Hills, *Invisible City*, 149.

²⁶ For the wedding festivities of Christina of Sweden, see Kimberlyn Montford, “L’Anno santo and Female Monastic Churches: The Politics, Business and Music of the Holy Year in Rome (1675),” *The Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 6/1 (2000); for information on the 1589 wedding of Cristina di Lorena and Ferdinando I, several sources are available including James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as theatrum mundi* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

the community. There were hundreds of monastic houses inside the city walls and throughout the surrounding Tuscan dominion; many had ancient roots and the patronage of the oldest and most respected families. No single religious rule or mission dominated the monastic landscape: Benedictine, Franciscan, Camadolese, and the Dominicans with their most famous monk, Savonarola, all had both male and female houses in nearly every quarter of the city. Some were service oriented, running hospitals and shelters while others relied on charity; several wealthy houses boasted large communities with overflowing chapels. Few new communities were created after about 1300; this is particularly true of female houses. Already, there was an increasing desire for women's communities to become enclosed and while older houses could claim a tradition of openness, new institutions could not. Reforms were often resisted by the monastics, especially women's communities whose numbers soared between the *quattrocento* and the *seicento* for political reasons while their freedoms diminished.²⁷ A truly reformed convent could not be one that already existed—a new one had to be created.

La Concezione

The Florentine Benedictine institution founded in 1562 known as the *Venerabile e Nobile Monastero della Santissima Concettione della Santa Vergine Maria in via della*

²⁷ Pietro Battara, *La popolazione di Firenze alla metà del '500* (Florence: Rinascimento del Libro, 1935); Brucker, Gene A. "Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imaginations in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 41-62; Sharon T. Strocchia, "Taken into Custody: Girls and Convent Guardianship in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 17/2 (2003): 177-200; Richard C. Trexler, "Celibacy in the Renaissance: The Nuns of Florence," in *The Women of Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1994), 17-27.

Scala di Firenze, detto il Monastero Nuovo (henceforth *La Concezione*) and its female inhabitants exemplify the ways in which women participated in the life of their city by contributing to its cultural, political, economical and social well being.²⁸ This institution exhibited traits that were both common to the era and unique; by examining it we may observe the connections between several intertwining topics imperative to any discussion of life in the early modern era including class distinction, the strength of familial ties, artistic enterprise, religious upheaval, and the formation of a city-wide identity on an increasingly international stage.

While *La Concezione* provides many points in common with other monasteries and convents, it was an exceptional institution. Most female convents were supervised by local clergy, and increasingly after Trent— by the archbishop; they frequently housed women from many different families from a range of classes; and they often sustained themselves with a garden, vineyard or handcrafts that they routinely sold to the community. From a liturgical and musical point of view, a defining characteristic of most convents was the fact that during Mass, the nuns sat in a small chapel separate from the main public church where their faces could not be seen but their voices could be heard; polyphony, although technically against the statutes, was common, even expected in

²⁸ This title is in no way standard as the order of the words and the words themselves vary from source to source and even within sources. However, the essential components of *La Concezione*, *Via della Scala* and *Il Monastero Nuovo* are the consistent identifying markers of this institution. The most divergent title I found is “*la Immacolata Concettione della Sfantissim]a Genitrice di Dio M[ari]a sempre Vergine*” found in Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze, Mazzatinti Inventari II II 152, (hereafter, BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152) Parte Prima, Delle cose spettanti a tutte le Monache del Monastero in Comune, Capitolo Primo: Delli Obblighi, Efeuzioni, e Priuilegi del Mona.o secondo al sua Fondazione, p.5.

wealthy convents.²⁹ In contrast to these more conventional convent practices, La Concezione was overseen by an order of knights closely tied to the Medici family rather than by local monastic authorities or the bishop; convent membership was so exclusive that the dowry was a formality— hence, there was no mixture of classes; the nuns rarely sold or made goods, as there was no need for the convent to be self-sustaining; there was no public church associated with the institution, and even the “outside” chapel was seen only by selective admittance. Finally, the women of La Concezione did not engage in polyphony for public consumption. These unique aspects of La Concezione were due to the highly politicized nature and operation of the convent; the result was a private space in which many of the activities of a noble woman’s life existed in a limited microcosm. La Concezione was at once an important part of Florentine civic life and at the same time, distinctly separate from it.

In 1562, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I, established the *Sacro Ordine Marittimo dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano Papa e Martire*, a military society of aristocrats that served both sacred and secular purposes. There were three categories of members: military officers, priests, and servants; the latter included musicians.³⁰ Their main agenda

²⁹ Although no comprehensive study has been undertaken concerning the use of polyphony in female monastic institutions across Italy, recent scholarly studies have indicated that among urban, wealthy convents, there was a pervasive presence of polyphony and an interest in preserving its continuing practice. However, Jonathan Glixon has noted that his preliminary research in Venice indicates that polyphony was not as prevalent in that city’s convents. Personal Communication, 4 April 2008.

³⁰ Ordine di Santo Stefano, *Statviti, Capitoli, Et Constitvitioni, dell’Ordine de’ Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, Fondato et dotato dall’Illust[rissimo] Et Eccell[enza]. S[ignor] Cosimo Medici, Duca II di Fiorenza, e di Siena, Riformati dal Sereniss[ima]. Don Ferdinando Medici, Terzo Gran Duca di Toscana et Gran Maestro di detto Ordine. Et appruati, et publicati nel Capitolo generale di detto Ordine, l’Anno MDXC. Con le facultà, indulti, et privilegi concessi dalla Santità di Papa Pio IIII et da N[ostro] S[ignor] Sisto Papa V et dal suddetto fondatore. Con la Tavola copiosissima delle materie, e Capitoli. In Fiorenza, Nella*

was to protect the city of Pisa, the Mediterranean coast and the merchant vessels of Tuscany from pirates and Muslim attackers while expanding Medici influence and fostering political relationships throughout Europe. As a religious institution, it was approved by Pope Pius IV in 1561; it followed the Rule of Saint Benedict and maintained a number of priests and clerics who administered the church. The Order accepted as its members only those of noble birth; one intent of the Order was to establish a Florentine patriciate—a class that had only loosely been formed under the republic. The Duke specially selected both Florentines and foreigners to serve as cavalieri/courtiers to the new Medici court; in doing so, he created a loyal social and political network.

Cosimo installed himself (and his decedents) as *Gran Maestro* of the *Chiesa Conventuale e Ordine*; in a parallel move, his consort, Eleonora de Toledo, provided for the establishment and construction of a female counterpart to the Order of Santo Stefano.³¹ In 1592, construction was completed on an edifice in the northwest corner of Florence, and in a display of civic pageantry, five women processed across town to become its founding members. La Concezione became known as the elite convent of Florence—in addition to housing many women of aristocratic heritage, their ladies and their servants, the new convent was an emblem for reformed pious devotion, feminine virtue and patrician standards.

Stamperia di Filippo Giunti. MCXCV. Con Licenza, et Privilegio Tassato in Quattro Giulii sciolto. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas, CR 5535 S6 A3 1595 [The Medici Collection].

³¹ In addition to establishing a new Florentine convent, the Order took control over the Medieval Benedictine convent of San Benedetto in Pisa. Archivio di Stato, Pisa (hereafter ASPi) 2878, Capitolo XXXIII: Instruzione [per] eleggersi la Madre Abbadessa di San Benedetto di Pisa, p.470-72.

After more than two hundred years as the affluent convent of the ruling family, La Concezione closed in 1808 during the Napoleonic suppression of all of the city's convents and monasteries.³² Fortunately, a number of vital documents are still extant. Most of these are housed in the main archives of the city; others are spread throughout both city and personal libraries and collections. While some information is still available, much, if not most, documentation relating to La Concezione has been lost.

The Medici Family and La Concezione

Eleonora de Toledo de' Medici, daughter of the Spanish viceroy of Naples, descendant of the Castilian kings, Grand Duchess of Tuscany and consort to Cosimo I, one of the sixteenth century's most important leaders, was in a position to affect culture and politics on both the local and international stage. Her Spanish-style devotion influenced her private religious practices and devotional spaces and contributed to her interest in the Order of the Jesuits at the Florentine court.³³ Until recently, she has been largely ignored by academia as just another consort of leisure; however, art historians, initially focusing on her many portraits, have begun to affirm Eleonora as an important woman of great intelligence and wit and as a patron of the arts in her own right.³⁴

³² The Medici family rule ended in 1737 with the death of the last Grand Duke Gian Gastone; Florence then became part of the Hapsburg Empire.

³³ Chiara Franceschini, "*Los scholars son cosa de su excelentia, como lo es toda la Compañia*: Eleonora di Toledo and the Jesuits," 181-206 in *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchess of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

³⁴ Bruce Leon Edelstein, "The Early Patronage of Eleonora di Toledo: The Camera Verde and its Dependencies in the Palazzo Vecchio" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1995).

For much of her life, the Duchess was in very poor health, and on 17 December 1562, the day before her death, she established a last testament, which dispensed her money and possessions among many recipients.³⁵ One of the most important legacies she created at this time was the establishment of La Concezione and provisions for its long-term sustainability; she bequeathed some of her possessions and one thousand scudi a year in perpetuity, one of the largest sums she left to an organization.³⁶ The following year, Cosimo began the process of designing and building the convent and church, though it would be thirty years before it was inhabited. Giuseppe Richa, in his systematic examination of all of the religious institutions of Florence, recounts how Cosimo and Eleonora established La Concezione as a sanctuary for the very finest women of the city.

The piety and gratitude that moved the Grand Duke Cosimo I to found in 1561 the Illustrious *Ordine de' Cavalieri di Santo Stefano Papa, e Martire*, equally moved Duchess Eleonora di Toledo, wife of Cosimo, to found under the same Rule a Monastery of *Gentildonne* for those of the finest quality, who before entering were expected to demonstrate Nobility in the same manner as the Cavalieri of the said Order.³⁷

Most of Richa's account concerns the history of the property— the heart of the convent had been the *Sale di Papa* of the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria Novella. Many

³⁵ Eleonora's will was made on 16 December 1562 in Pisa near the chapel of Saint Matthew, she passed within a day from consumption and her body was transferred to Florence for a grand funeral, sung Mass and burial in the Medici chapel of San Lorenzo.

³⁶ Archivio di Stato, Firenze, Mediceo del Principato (hereafter ASF MP) 5922a, ins. 28, f.129v. "Al Monasterio da fondarsi scudi mille l'anno sopra il Monte." Note: in comparison, she left the Jesuit School 200 scudi; see Chapter Two.

³⁷ Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie storiche delle chiese fiorentine, divise ne' suoi quartieri* (Firenze: Viviani, 1754-62, reprinted Rome: Multigrafica Editrice, 1972), 110-20. Tomo quarto, Quartiere di Santa Maria Novella. Lezione VIII, "Del Monastero Nuovo Detto della CONCEZIONE," p.110. La pietà, e la gratitudine, che mossero il Granduca Cosimo I ad istituire nel 1561. L'Illustre Ordine de' Cavalieri di Santo Stefano Papa, e Martire, animarono parimente D[uchessa] Leonora di Toledo moglie di Cosimo a fondare sotto la stessa Regola un Monastero di Gentildonne, le quali prima di entrare fossero tenute di fare le provanze di Nobilità nella maniera, che lo fanno i Cavalieri di detto Ordine.

popes, including Martin V and Leo X, as well as princes and dignitaries had stayed in the rooms during their visits to Florence. Cosimo chose prime real estate— located next to the glorious *Chiostro Verde*— for the new convent.

The only description of the interior of the convent exists in this brief history. There were three stories, all architecturally designed to encourage praise; the ground floor included a cloakroom, a room with a writing desk as well as other offices. The second floor included a comfortable and modern infirmary while the third floor held a dormitory and at the end was a separate loft. Near the dormitory could be seen the old rooms of the friars; this was a large and spacious place, now divided into three separate areas. Richa notes that the old space contained only some of the marvelous furnishings and pieces of art that once adorned it, but that other works had been added, particularly to the ground floor. These were created and displayed to exemplify the status of the convent and its inhabitants.

The community of La Concezione included many members of the finest families of Florence and a few from beyond, as did the Order of Santo Stefano. The sisterhood read like a roster of Tuscan politicians, including daughters from the Aldobrandini, Altoviti, Antinori, Albizi, Baldounetti, Bardi, Buontempi, Capponi, Falconetti, Gerini, Gerardi, Ginori, Gondi, Malaspina, Malatesta, Del Migliore, Neroni, Panciatichi, Piccolomini, Rucellai, Sodierini, Spini, Tornaquinci, Ubbaldini, Ubertini, and Vinta families among others ... and of course the Medici family.

No fewer than fifteen women with the Medici family name lived in La Concezione. The last was Princess Violante de' Medici; she entered in the 1720s taking

solemn vows.³⁸ The first was Maria Cristina de' Medici, first daughter, or *primogenita*, of Grand Duke Cosimo II and Maria Magdalena Habsburg.³⁹ Born in 1609, she was given permission by the Pope in 1619 and entered La Concezione the same year; she died outside of its walls in 1632.⁴⁰ Most of the Medici princesses were married to kings, dukes and powerful men across Europe, however, a few lived in convents. It is believed that both Maria Cristina and her aunt Maria Magdalena (1600-1633), the daughter of Fernando I and Christina of Lorraine, were disabled in some way; Maria Cristina was likely a hunchback, a disability that would have kept her off the marriage market.⁴¹ It has been speculated that neither took the final steps of profession but rather that they lived more as permanent guests, or as *educande*, complete with apartments within or adjacent to the convents.⁴² The family's archives indicate that permission was sought for Maria

³⁸ ASPi 2878.

³⁹ Bibliographic resources for Maria Cristina: Emilio Grassellini and Arnaldo Fracassini, *Profili Medicei: Origine, Sviluppo, Decadenza della Famiglia Medici* (Florence: SP44, 1982), 110; Pompeo Litta, Luigi Passerini, Federico Odorici, Federico Stefani, Francesco di Mauro Polvica, and Constantino Coda. *Famiglie celebri italiane* (Milano: P.E. Giusti, 1819), tav. XV; Gaetano Pieraccini, *La stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo. Saggio di ricerche sulla trasmissione ereditaria dei caratteri biologici* (Florence: Nardini editore, 1986), vol. II, 525-28.

⁴⁰ She was previously only known to have entered by 1621; Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theatre*, 26 and Kelley Harness, "La Flora and the End of Female Rule in Tuscany," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 454.

Letters from the family archive, however, clearly indicate her habitation in the convent as early as June, 1619, see fn. 45 below. By August of that year, her ladies had joined the princess because the Duchess wrote to the father of Maria Cristina's companion Leonora concerning plans for the girl's engagement. ASF MP 6101, f.79, dated 1619 08 12. Documentary sources for the Arts and Humanities, The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID #15542.

⁴¹ My thanks to Professor Tim Carter for pointing out the likely nature of her condition. Tim Carter, "Jacopo Peri, 1561-1633: His Life and Works" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1979), 96.

⁴² Maria Cristina's official position is in question; most documents indicate that she was there for education and that she left periodically for short visits with her family.

ASPi 2878, Proemio.

Nostri come in clausura sono alcune stanze, che si chiamano dlla Signora questo era l'appartamento che servi alla Serenis[sima]: Principessa Maria Cristina Figliuola del Ser[enissima] Gran Duca Cosimo II, e della Ser[enissim]a Arci[duchess]a M[ari]a Madd[alen]a d'Austria mettendo la sudetta sua Figliuola che Anni otto in educazione in questo Mona[ster]o, e ci stette in più tempi spezzati Anni dodici.

Cristina to enter the convent with an entourage of ladies-in-waiting and servants to assist her due to her delicate health.⁴³ The family also asked for special dispensation to break clausura; numerous letters attest to Maria Cristina's attendance at family functions at court and the family estate Villa del Poggio Imperiale.⁴⁴ Other special favors and provisions were made for the reigning family's many relations, including special luncheon privileges granted to Maria Cristina's sister Margherita and Camilla Martelli, second wife of Cosimo I.⁴⁵

However, ASF MP 6108, f.209, a letter from Carlo di Ferdinando to Caterina di Ferdinando implies that Maria Cristina did take vows: "Le disse anche che la risoluzione della Sig[nor]a Principessa Maria Christiana figliuola della Ser[enissim]a di andare nel Monastero nuovo non haveva mosso punto la S[igno]ra Principessa Maria Maddalena nostra sorella sino a quell'ora a seguirla, ma hoggi le dico come le ne è venuta voglia, et così enterà nel Monastero della Crocetta."

It seems more likely that this should be read that she went to live there, rather than having taken vows. For biographical information on Maria Maddalena, see Harness, *Echoes*, 283-86.

⁴³ Archivio di Stato, Firenze, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 134 (ASF CRS 134), Pezzo 61 Filza Lettere diverti, 1605-1739. [Coppia from Il Car. S. Onof] 1 Apr 1632: Rever[en]do Signor havendo fatto rappresentare, alla S[acra] Congreg[azione], la Principessa Maria Christiana Medici, che [per] alcune indispos[itione] che patisce, le sia necessario, star' [per] qualche tempo fuori di cotesto Monasterio della Concet[zione] dove con licenzia di q[uest]a S[an]ta Sede al presente si trova con alcune donne, ch' la servono q[ue]sti Emin[ent]i miei Sig[no]ri a cui si è dato parte, si contentano che voi possiate dar licenza, alla Ma[d]jema Principessa che uscita che sarà del' Med[issi]mo Mon[aste]rio [per] l'aus' sud[de]t[te] insieme con due donne, due Zitelle et una suora, che [cui] la servono vi possa ritornare in compagnia dell' Med[issi]me serva ta [per]o nel resto la forma è le cond[izio]ni contenute nella prima gratia; Tanto [dunq]ue ?) potete [per] metterl' che in virtù della presente vi si da t[utt]a l'aiuta necessaria, l' state Sanò di Roma.

In a letter to the Medici ambassador in Rome, Duchess Maria Maddalena asked for assistance in obtaining permission for Maria Cristina to enter La Concezione with a lady-in-waiting of the same age and six servants. ASF MP 6101, f.224, dated 1619. Documentary sources for the Arts and Humanities, The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID #15591. Princess Maria Magdalena entered La Crocetta with six ladies, Harness, *Echoes*, 282. Documents suggests that Maria Magdalena might have made her decision in emulation of Maria Cristina. "Le disse anche che la resolution della Sig[no]ra Principessa Maria Christiana figliuola della Ser[enissim]a [Maria Maddalena d' Austria] di andare nel Monastero nuovo non haveva mosso punto la S[igno]ra Principessa Maria Maddalena nostra sorella sino a quell'ora a seguirla, ma hoggi le dico come le ne è venuta voglia, et così enterà nel Monastero della Crocetta." ASF MP 6108, f.209, dated 1619 06 25. Documentary sources for the Arts and Humanities, The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID# 6244.

⁴⁴ For example, in 1620, she was present at the court for various Carnival activities. ASF MP 6108, f.808. Documentary sources for the Arts and Humanities, The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID #6654.

⁴⁵ ASF MP 6101, f.205, dated 1619 06 27. Documentary sources for the Arts and Humanities, The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID #15589.

The other Medici women were relatives of the ducal family. For example, Suora Scolastica, daughter of Alessandro, was Cosimo II's niece; she entered by 1599, making hers one of the earliest professions. Two daughters of the Senator Marchese Lorenzo Medici went to La Concezione: Suora Maria Maddalena professed before 1604 and Maria Vittoria professed in 1606; in 1642, the latter ordered bright fabrics of yellow and red silk and taffeta for a commemoration of the chapel, and she died in 1650 with the title of Madre.⁴⁶ Madre Maura Medici was already professed by 1640 when her mother Signora Leonora Medici neé Giacheni left her money and possessions in her will; Maura died in 1657. Madre Cavaliera Suora Ipolita, daughter of Signor Piero Medici, is noted in 1614 for her support of a twelve-year-old girl from the Bardi family. Suora Gostanza, daughter of Cavaliere Ottaviano and Ersilia Medici, lived in La Concezione by 1601, but her status is unclear. Both Suora Maria Celeste and Suora Maria were admitted by special approval of the duke because they were *sopra il numero*, or women who were accepted even though the choir had reached its maximum number of sisters (until 1650 the number was twenty then it was raised to about fifty).⁴⁷ In addition to the customary dowry, *soprannumerarie* paid a few extra *scudi* for their upkeep every three months.

⁴⁶ ASF CRS 134. Pezzo 33 Libro Giornale, 1637-1654, f.42r.

29 Ottobre 1642: A spese di Chiesa /-undici di m.ta 31.11.4 pag[a]ti [per] la gliatura e Tela de paramenti di Taffetta Gialli e Rossi della Tribuna della n[ost]ra Chiesa fatti dall'Mede[sim]o Sig[nor] fra[te] Pietro Medici a S[antissim]aria Vittoria Medici sua Sor[el]la e n[ost]ra monaca.

⁴⁷ The term *coro* is used in convent documents to mean both the “choir” of professed sisters when they gathered together and the physical space of the inner chapel, as in the “choir loft.”

Convent Documents

Evidence related to La Concezione stems from a number of important documents. The Florentine state archives house the largest collection of documents about the convent; there are one hundred twenty-eight items ranging from a few loose papers to large bound books dated between 1577 and 1808.⁴⁸ Included are the *Libri Giornali*, *Libri di Entrata e Uscita*, and *Libri di Debitori e Creditori* as well as other account books, records for professions and funerals, official communications between the Abbess and Santo Stefano, copies of testaments that remembered the sisters, and documentation relating to the suppression of the convent. In addition to these formal documents from the Florentine official collection dating from the era of the suppression, the state archives of Pisa and the rare book collections of the national library of Florence each hold materials related to the convent. Two documents in particular are valuable for the wealth of information they contain.

The first is a charter and handbook about the operations of the convent written for the Medici Order of Santo Stefano; it is now housed in the archives of the Order of Santo Stefano in the State Archives of Pisa (henceforth “the Charter”).⁴⁹ While the manuscript is dated 1726, it appears to be a presentation or reference copy that was subsequently compiled from earlier exemplars now lost; the earliest material dates from 1588, four years before the convent opened its doors. The Charter contains nearly five hundred

⁴⁸ ASF CRS 134, Pezzi 1 through 128.

⁴⁹ ASPi 2878. “Il Cerimoniere Pratico ovvero un esatto Trattato delle funzioni Pontificali da farsi dal Prelato dell’ Ordine Militare di S[anto] Stefano Papa e Mar[tir]e: nella Chiesa delle Monache della Santo Stefano Concezione di Firenze. Tomo Secondo.” I have located no “tomo primo.”

pages concerning the responsibilities of the Order to the convent. It includes information pertaining to rites and rituals: for example, who was to enter and in what order during a particular ceremony, where they should stand and what should be read at what time. Many of the chapters describe the basic rituals of the convent as well as alternate variations for those rites depending on which official was to conduct the ceremony and how many of the sisters would be involved. The rules and regulations concerning the role of musicians from Santo Stefano as well as the appropriateness of the sung mass to particular situations are also explained in detail. This document makes clear that La Concezione played an important role in the political and social consciousness of the Order.

The second document is a manuscript copy of the constitution and by-laws of La Concezione from within the convent (henceforth “the Constitution”). This is housed at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze in the Rare Book and Manuscript Collections. It is a nineteenth-century copy ostensibly based on lost exemplars. The date of the body is 1655 (more than sixty years after the opening of the convent); there is also an appendix of modifications from 1750, a separate preface from 1814, and a note of provenance from Leopold II dated 1846, nearly forty years after the convent ceased to exist as an institution.⁵⁰ This document was intended to provide regulations for the daily

⁵⁰ The 1814 insert provides the only information about the convent after its dissolution. The official records end in 1808, it is my assumption that one of the last women took possession of some of the materials not taken by the government. The author wrote a short note of introduction (below) and a brief history of the convent and inserted it into the book that held the Constitution:

Altezza Imperiale, e Reale: Donna Teresa Francesca Rimbotti Religiosa professa Corale Benedettina Cassinese, Cavalieressa dell'Ordine di S[ant]o Stefano P[apa] e Martire, già del Soppresso Convento, sotto il Titolo della S[antissi]ma Concezione, posto in via della scala di questa Città di Firenze, Umiliforma

functioning of the community within the walls. Primary concerns of its drafters were the rules of governing the different classifications for women who lived there, their obligations, voting rights, and the responsibilities of the officers and the details of the preparation for rituals.⁵¹

While these two documents exhibit significant overlap, the manner in which each treats its topic differs. In general, the Charter provides a very formal, perfunctory approach, while the Constitution is more personal, lavishing greater care on day-to-day activities. These differences highlight the external perspective of outsiders telling the community what they want them to know, and the internal perspective of the enclosed women interpreting what they are told. From a gendered angle, the Charter and the Constitution exhibit the distribution and use of power in that the former corresponds to ‘men who govern’ and the latter represents ‘women who both govern themselves and are ultimately governed by men.’

serva, e suddita dell' A[ltezza] V[enerabile] I[mperiale], e Reale più profondo rispetto, si fa pregio esporre all' I[mperiale], e R[eale] Trono, il sincero, ed umile desiderio, non tanto della Rappresentante, quanto ancora delle altre Consorelle di vedere ripristinato l'antico detto ordine Religioso, quale merita, si [per] la Fondazione, quanto ancor [per] le costituzioni, Regola, ed altre circostanze, che lo accompagnano, non esclusi, i favori, Grazie, e Privilegi, dei quali, e delle quali fu arricchito in ogni tempo, come dall'annesso storico ristretto si rileva. Questo desiderio si è reso anco più violento nel riflettere, come l'antico detto locale, unitamente alla Chiesa, ed altri annessi, non ostante il Fabbicato di nuovo, non toglie, ne impedisce in modo alcuno, potersi con somma facilità, e minor spesa ridurre alla consueta forma [per] ivi ristorare le Religiose sudette, come appunto lo era prima della succeduta soppressione, onde avvalorata da sì plausibile ragioni. Supplica la somma Bontà e Clemenza dell' I e R[eale] A[ltezza] V[enerabile] a volersi degnare, ordinare, che il medesimo venga restituito alle presenti Religiose Benedettine Casinensi dell'Insigne Ordine di S[ant]o Stefano Papa, e Martire in [status quo], colla pronta resituzione e consegna di tutti i Beni, quali sono restati invenduti, e previa la consegna dei refetturi contrasti di fitto, o sivero assegnarle altro Locale Capace dell'osservanza delle Regole del Coro L'istituto; che della Grazia [-].

NB: the convent was never reinstituted as petitioned here and very little information exists as to what may have become of the women living there or the possessions of the convent at the time of its closing.

⁵¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, “Costituzioni e Ordini del ven[erabile]. Monastero della Concettione della S[anta] Vergine Maria, chiamato il Monastero Nuovo, in via della Scala di Firenze: con approvazione del 3 ottobre 1655 e con modificazioni del 1750.”

These documents will be used to support the thesis that the musical culture of La Concezione was strictly regulated in order to maintain and heighten the convent's role as the most pious and elite convent of Florence—the establishment of perfectly reformed musical practices was part of creating the perfectly reformed convent.

Chapter Synopses

This dissertation treats the musical culture of the convent known as 'il monastero nuovo' or La Concezione through five chapters.

Chapter One concerns La Concezione as a convent designed to be a response to the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, and specifically to the Council of Trent as it was understood by the Medici establishment. The decrees of Trent were all but quoted into the convent handbooks. Although the rulings of Trent concerning music were vague at best, and hence easily manipulated by regional authorities, a reading of the drafts and preliminary reports is instructive in appreciating the different interpretations of musical reform seen across Italy. This chapter examines La Concezione's response to reform-era policies through the convent's primary documents.

Chapter Two discusses the political connections between La Concezione, the Medici court, the Order of Santo Stefano and the prominent families from Florence and beyond that made up the La Concezione community. The interrelationships formed by the Court-Order-Convent triangle provide an understanding of La Concezione's role in Florentine politics and the ways the institution was perceived by those outside its walls. The founding of the convent by Eleonora di Toledo, Cosimo I, and Ferdinando I was a

spectacular event that would have drawn the eye of not only Florentines, but also courts near and far and the papacy searching for models of Catholic reform. The continued prosperity of the convent depended on the support of the court for political and financial matters and the Order for practical and spiritual concerns; the convent, in return, sustained rituals and prayers designed to intercede on the behalf of Florence to the heavens.

Chapter Three establishes the musical culture surrounding the convent. The Grand Dukes were well known for their patronage of music during civic rituals, weddings, processions and at court. The Order of Santo Stefano, although not a musical organization by design, had a strong tradition of hiring and training musicians for their chapel that could double as performers hired by La Concezione. The traditions known to have been important to these two entities provide the context for the musical background of the daughters who entered La Concezione, the superiors who used sacred music in their own church and the musicians hired to perform for the convent – as they were also employed by the Order and the Court.

Chapter Four describes the use of music within the convent by tracing the rules and regulations established for music-making as well as supporting documentation from other archival sources. As a model of post-Tridentine piety, the women of La Concezione were strictly prohibited from performing polyphony in their choir loft as was common at other institutions. Rather than bending or breaking this rule, it appears that the women used their strict public adherence to monophony as proof of their moral superiority and righteous position as the elite convent of Florence. A particular passage from the

Constitution explicitly describes how polyphonic music could be performed by the sisters, but strictly as an activity within the cloister; the authors were clearly differentiating between public music for devotion and private music for internal consumption.⁵²

Chapter Five describes the image of La Concezione as created by the court and the Order and as propagated by the women inside the walls. There was both a public image—sustained by the indelible personification of piety, and a private image known only to those of the cloister. The court, the Order of Santo Stefano, the prominent families of Florence and the women themselves shaped both the internal character and external persona of the convent through their public documents, physical structure and by maintaining an air of aloofness that was beyond reproach.

This dissertation adds to current body of knowledge about the roles convents played in their cities; the political and social interactions that cloistered women necessarily had with their families, superiors and local authorities; and a use of music that, while rather different than the models discussed in recent research on female monastic communities in the early modern period, provides an understanding of monastic and musical reforms specific to Florence during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁵² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, p.55.

10. Rinnoviamo l'obbedienza de capitoli vecchi al Capitolo 12 che bisognando a alcuna Mon[ac]a imparare Canto fermo o figurato, o suono etiam che di Organo non si possa fare in su la porta della clausura, ma solamente alla grata, e acciò non si abbi avvenire anco a questo, vogliamo che le Badesse faccino opera che quelle chi sanno cantare di canto fermo, e sonar l'organo in modo che possino insegnare all'altre insegnino; e bisognando per nostra autorità lo comandino in virtù di santa Obbedienza, ricordando loro che per Decreto della Sacra Congregazione dell'Anno 1620 è proibito il cantare di canto figurato in pubblico, ma solamente e concesso tra di lor privatamente.

Chapter One

Abiding by Trent: Contradictions and Realities

The Council of Trent, as the reforming body of the Catholic Church in the mid-sixteenth century, has long been held as the major agent of change in the early modern era, affecting the political climate, court culture and religious structures of Catholic Europe.¹ However, recent historians have avoided generalizing the effects of the Council because the wording of the rules and regulations were intentionally broad allowing for each diocese, region and city to interpret the decrees according to the customs of the area and the agenda of the city leaders. The result was widespread inequality of “reform” and localized pockets of strict and relaxed ordinances. Additionally, an increase in conflict between secular leaders, local bishops and archbishops, the papacy and individual churches and monastic houses fostered many of the tensions that marked the period.

The decrees were meant to rejuvenate the faithful and to create a spirit of renewal across Catholic Europe. Local authorities responsible for implementing the mandates controlled how the decrees were interpreted and the extent to which they were enforced within the region; the Medici in turn, took advantage of the new movement towards devotion. This chapter will focus on those decrees that concerned the establishment of a

¹ The standard twentieth-century history has been Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Ernest Graf (London, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1957-1961); for a more contemporary reading of the Council of Trent, see John O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2000). The Council met in three sessions, 1545-7, 1551-2 and 1562-3; subcommittees met to discuss assigned issues and prepare legislation for full-council votes. The majority of issues concerned the dogmatic and pragmatic concerns of doctrine and ritual.

patrician convent and the musical repercussions for female religious within the Florentine enforcement of those reforms.

While La Concezione was deeply enmeshed in the many conflicts and changes that arose in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Council of Trent had a specific, significant impact on its foundation, opening and operation. More explicitly, the Medici family's perception and interpretation of the Council of Trent had an effect on the convent; the spirit of reform provided opportunities for the Florentine dukes, as new rulers of a historically important city, to renew their position within Catholic Europe. The convent created a public image that espoused the Council of Trent's edicts regarding several issues including clausura; vows of poverty, obedience and chastity; extensive rules on the administration of convent rituals; and ardent piety. The Medici complied with the new legislation to the extent that it benefited their objectives. As mandated by the decrees, this included enforcement by local authorities: the same patrician families who wrote many of the convent documents provided spiritual and secular guidance, and supported the inhabitants through financial means and material wares.

The Council of Trent and Music

For centuries, historians have misinterpreted the decrees of the Council of Trent on music and propagated the myth that the church fathers condemned polyphonic singing

and playing music in church.² Much of the misunderstanding stemmed from a failure to partition the arguments that were raised in committee meetings and preliminary drafts from the final, public decrees.

In his hyperbolic discussion of musical reforms and the Council of Trent, Robert Hayburn exalted the role of the Council by stating that it “was of paramount significance both in the shaping of general ecclesiastical usages and in the reform of the worship and the music of the church.”³ Hayburn outlined four primary concerns of the church fathers that served as the basis for the decrees of the Council regarding music: the restriction of non-liturgical texts, unintelligibility in sung pieces, the use of secular songs, and long and secular-based organ compositions. Encompassing this platform of abuses, the myth of the Tridentine musical reforms developed early in the seventeenth century and continued until recent reviews of the literature established that much had been misinterpreted.⁴

The most widespread myth was one concerning the composer Palestrina who was reputed to have “saved” polyphony by writing the *Missa Papae Marcelli* in six-voices proving that polyphony could be written in such a way that the words could be

² Renaissance music history has long relied on a grander view of Tridentine reforms than was actually decreed; until the beginning of this century, many textbooks continued to teach that Trent had a fundamental impact on religious composition.

³ Robert Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music: 95 AD to 1977 AD* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1977), 25-31. While this source has been frequently cited, its accuracy and reliability should be considered carefully.

⁴ Craig Monson’s article on the subject provided a much-needed re-appraisal of the role of the conclave in reforming music and women religious. The article surveys several documents noting the types of abuses submitted by various ecclesiastical authorities. Craig A. Monson, “The Council of Trent Revisited,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55/1 (Spring, 2002): 1-37. The appendix includes summaries of pre-Trent reform attempts.

understood.⁵ Tangential to this was the myth that polyphonic music was decreed all but banned in churches. In reality, this is only a half-truth. The official decrees actually say very little about performing music. The only time the topic was addressed was in 1562 during the twenty-second session concerning abuses in the Mass. The prefatory material to the body of the session is entitled “Decree Concerning the Things to be Observed and Avoided in the Celebration of Mass” and opens with the affirmation that the Mass was to be “celebrated with all religious devotion and reverence.” Music is mentioned only when addressing the responsibilities of the local ordinaries that “shall be zealously concerned and be bound to prohibit and abolish all those things which either *covetousness*...or irreverence...or superstition...have introduced.” Under the topic of avoiding irreverence in the Mass

they shall also banish from the churches all such music which, whether by the organ or in the singing, contains things that are lascivious or impure; likewise all worldly conduct, vain and profane conversations, wandering around, noise and clamor, so that the house of God may be truly called a house of prayer.⁶

⁵ Lewis Lockwood in particular has done much to obliterate this notion. His work on composer Vincenzo Ruffo indicates that several composers, including Palestrina, were influential in demonstrating the effective use of polyphony in sacred music. See Lewis H. Lockwood, *The Counter-Reformation the Masses of Vincenzo Ruffo*, Studi di musica veneta 2 (Venice: Fondazione di Giorgio Cini, 1970); and “Vincenzo Ruffo and Musical Reform after the Council of Trent,” *Musical Quarterly* 43/1 (1957): 342-71.

⁶ H. J. Schroeder, trans. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1960), 150-51. The italics are original to the translation. Schroeder’s more literal translation of “sive organo, sive cantu” as “organ or in the singing” is translated by both Hayburn and Monson as “instrument and voice” implying a wider prohibition against all musical instruments playing music that was “lascium aut impurum.” Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 28; Monson, “Council of Trent,” 11. From the prefatory material to the twenty-second session. “Ab ecclesis vero musicas eas, ubi siue organo, siue cantu lascium aut impurum aliquid miscetur, item saeculares omnes actiones, uana, atque adeo profana colloquia, deambulationes, strepitus, clamores arceant; ut domus Dei, uere domus orationis esse uideatur, ac dici possit.” In *The Council of Trent, Canones et decreta Sacrosancti Oecumenici et Generalis Concilii Tridentini sub Pavlo III, Ivlio III, Pio IIII. Pontificibu Max. CVM Privilegio. Mediolani Apud Antonium Antonianum. Session Tertia, 1564.* The Getty Research Institute, Special Collections 93-B14438. The latter is probably based on the edition by Paulus Manutius.

This is very different from the “total ban on polyphony” previously thought by musicologists to have been the mandate of the Council. Four details of the final version attest to its nominal status among reform concerns. First, this mild reproof is stated as part of the prefatory material to the decrees of the imminent session rather than in a proper chapter of issues to be reformed. Secondly, music is just one article among several listed as undesirable— any music that was so irreverent as to be an equivalent offense to “profane conversations” or “wandering around” was not a matter of purifying the liturgy but a reproach of improper decorum. Thirdly, the pronouncement only addresses music in the Mass, as indicated in the title of the section, not other formats outside of the rite that may have (and historically did) include music such as the Daily Offices, mystery plays, Marian devotions or domestic and civic displays of devotion. Fourthly, the final decree makes no mention of the unintelligibility of the text; it is surprising that the delegates gave such an important issue (given that it sparked the great “Palestrina Myth”) so little thought, leaving out a clause that probably would have easily passed the vote.⁷ For these reasons, the reform of music as seen in the published decrees would appear to be more a subtle reminder of apposite use than a condemnation of an evil to be purged. While individual council members disagreed concerning what should and should not be permitted, the published result was a cryptic censure of secular influences and an

⁷ Although there were a great many discussions about the nature of music and its use in the church, “unintelligibility” seems to have been generally agreed upon as undesirable. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*.

unpublished disapproval of counterpoint-laden texts (a grievance repeated by many popes and prelates over the centuries).⁸

The phrase “lascivious or impure” baffles modern musicologists probably as much as it did early modern church leaders and musicians. Perhaps it is to be understood that the councilmen were restricting secular music, such as that commonly found in *canti firmi*, dance jaunties or lewd text borrowed from popular song, rather than an all-encompassing ban on any music that was not monophonic chant. Certainly, music that was considered to have come from Pope Gregory in the form of the standard chants was not lascivious, while the most profane texts were. The organ and singing were singled out, however neither they nor other instruments were strictly banned, perhaps implying that the councilmen knew that the practice of playing musical instruments in church, like polyphonic singing, was so common and so valued in many places that placing more restrictive language in the decrees was a battle not worth fighting.⁹ This is perhaps the very reason the language is ambiguous—so that those who wished to continue using music (polyphonic, instrumental or otherwise) as part of sacred devotion could do so without causing further rifts in the reform effort.

The subcommittee that drafted the final version for the voting general congregation had to be mindful to make the decree address not the ills of each councilor’s own diocese, but Catholic Europe at large. Similarly, the emphasis the Council placed on

⁸ Monson also remarks on music’s relatively minor role in Tridentine reform. For pre-Trent musical prohibitions, see Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, chapters 1-2; and Karl Gustav Fellerer, “Church Music and the Council of Trent,” *Musical Quarterly* 39 (1953): 578-80.

⁹ Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 28 quotes a letter to the Council in defense of music: Emperor Ferdinand I of Spain stated that he would not support the suspension of polyphony because of its divine ability to inspire devotion.

regional interpretation and enforcement of the synods allowed the committees to write broad reform while giving local authorities the flexibility to decide the best implementation for their region. Given the diversity of opinions among council members and the extended length of the sessions, proposing language that was imprecise allowed for easier passage through formal voting sessions. In order to achieve the reforming objectives of the meetings, personal agendas were often assuaged in the final drafts to avoid additional rewrites or the elimination of the proposed decree altogether.

Despite the miniscule attention placed on music in the published decrees, the debate over the use of music in sacred contexts began even before the Council convened. Hayburn cites documents addressed to Pope Paul III that add music as a matter in need of conciliar attention in the 1550s and 1560s. It is clear that sides were forming even before the issue had reached the Council's docket. Music merited extensive discussions in the subcommittees of the twenty-second, twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions; each was largely composed of members who had already formed definite opinions.¹⁰ After many discussions and drafts of the legislation, the language that passed the vote was a significantly condensed version of the subcommittee hearings. The quintessence of those debates extended beyond what was appropriate during the Mass to the very nature of spirituality and Art. A draft from the twenty-second session committee on abuses in the Mass includes the assertion that

All things should indeed be so ordered that the Masses, whether they be celebrated with or without singing, may reach tranquilly into the ears and hearts of those who hear them, when everything is executed clearly and at

¹⁰ Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 25-27.

the right speed. In the case of those Masses which are celebrated with singing and with organ, let nothing profane be intermingled, but only hymns and divine praises. If anything is to be sung with the organ from the sacred services while they are in progress, let it be recited in a simple and clear voice beforehand so that no one will miss any part of the eternal reading of the sacred writings. The whole plan of singing in musical modes should be constituted not to give empty pleasure to the ear, but in such a way that the words may be clearly understood by all, and thus the hearts of the listeners be drawn to the desire of heavenly harmonies, in the contemplation of the joys of the blessed. Those things which are established for the celebration of the Masses should be observed in them and also in the other sacred services, so that those things which are performed in a sacred manner may be understood with greater reverence, piety and faith.¹¹

It is clear from this more detailed proposition on reform, that the version approved by the Council as a whole was a watering-down of the more proactive wishes of some council members if not simply a bare bones extraction. Clearly, there were (at least) two sides to this deliberation; one was led by zealous reformers such as Milanese Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, who desired a very strict application of musical reform—a near total suppression of polyphonic music in sacred space to avoid distracting the populace from appropriate worship. The opposing side, greater in number, favored music as an enhancement to devotion but supported the elimination of secular influences. The final determination reflected in part the interests of delegates who represented secular leaders such as Ferdinand I of Spain; these delegates were reluctant to eliminate church music that could also serve personal and political interests.

In the twenty-third session (1563) concerning clerical reform, music was mentioned as one of the subjects appropriate for clerical study. “They shall study

¹¹ Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 27. From “Canon 8.” Translation by Hayburn, quoted from Fiorenzo Romita, *Jus musicae liturgicae* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1947), 59.

grammar, singing [*cantus*], ecclesiastical computation and other useful arts.”¹² While this reference probably refers to the importance of competency in monophonic plainchant, it does not exclude other musics and it highlights music as an important part of erudite culture.

Late in 1563, during the rushed twenty-fifth session, the reform of the regulars was addressed. Music again caught the attention of the reformers, including Gabriele Paleotti, future archbishop of Bologna, staunch advocate of *clausura* and a proponent of the restriction of polyphony. A draft presented to the Council ordered that

The Divine Office should be continued by [the nuns] in high voice and not by professionals hired for that purpose, and they should answer in the Sacrifice of the Mass whatever the choir is accustomed to answer; but they will leave to the Deacon and Subdeacon the office of chanting the Lessons, Epistles, and Gospels. They will abstain from *modulating and inflecting the voice or from other artifice* of singing either in Choir or elsewhere the so called “figured” or “*instrumental*” chant (*cantus*).¹³

This draft departs from the broader twenty-second and twenty-fourth decrees precisely because it specifically concerned music-making by women. Female song had long been

¹² Schroeder, *The Canons and Decrees*, 176. Session 23, Chapter XVIII. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 28 translates “singing” as “the chants,” he cites Romita, *Jus musicae*, 61. “Aliarumq bonarum artium disciplinam discent” in the Council of Trent, *Canones et decreta*, 1564.

¹³ Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 29; the author cites Concilium Tridentinum 6:1043. Monson cites CT 9:1043 and translates it differently and with text not found in Hayburn, in italics above; Monson “Council of Trent,” 20: “Let the divine services be accomplished by the voices raised, and not by professionals hired for that purpose; and in the sacrifice of the Mass let the make the responses that the choir usually makes; but let them not usurp the role of the deacon and subdeacon of reciting the Lessons, Epistles and Gospels Let them abstain from modulating and inflecting the voice or from other artifice of singing, which is called “figured” or “instrumental,” as much in choir as elsewhere.” “Vocis modulatione atque inflexione aliove cantus artificio, quod figuratum vel organicum appellatur, tam in choro qual alibi absteineant.” In the Council of Trent, *Canones et decreta*, 1564. Italics are Monson’s. It seems, however, that in this context, *cantus* would be better translated as *song*.

considered a suspicious activity and a potentially dangerous pursuit by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁴

As Craig Monson notes, “The extremely restrictive musical decree presented to the general congregations on 20 November may have been primarily the work of one man, Paleotti.”¹⁵ However, this language never made it past the general council; in subsequent motions, councilmen decided, “musical songs are not to be prohibited” but they were not explicitly permitted to the nuns either.¹⁶ For all of Paleotti’s efforts, there was little official consensus; in all of the legislation pertaining to the twenty-fifth session, music is not mentioned once. This is likely because it was concluded that control of such music making should be the responsibility of a convent’s superiors and the local authorities.

The implementation of the decree was inconsistent—some bishops curtailed polyphonic music while others allowed it to continue or even flourish, each drawing upon or ignoring the discussions, drafts and final legislation as they wished. The Council itself was only concerned with three broad aspects of musical reform. The first was the abolishment of secular elements in the liturgy. Although passed by the twenty-second session, the inclusion of secular influences continued, as can be determined from the many subsequent admonitions that the continued practice should cease. The second was the curtailment of unintelligible text; although text setting and counterpoint procedures were hotly discussed in subcommittee, they never crystallized into formal

¹⁴ See the Introduction for an account of this controversy.

¹⁵ Monson “Council of Trent,” 21.

¹⁶ Monson “Council of Trent,” 22.

pronouncements. They did, however, survive their omission through new compositional practices – first in Rome and then regionally by the implementation of strict rules of composition by authorities such as Paleotti and Borromeo as though they had been mandated by the Council. The third aspect of reform was the restriction of polyphony to feast days or a total ban of most music making; this was a topic both vehemently supported and opposed by different factions within the Council. While the most of the language of the drafts was left out of the final decrees for political reasons, the harsher restrictions continued to be a viable interpretation that could be used by local leaders as part of the reform efforts.

As in other aspects of musical reform, the musical activity of nuns received more attention in subcommittee than in formal legislation; in fact, the decrees concerning religious orders lack any mention of the arts. The result of this negation was that some communities thrived musically and others struggled in secret. Although it was a tangential issue to both the more general musical reforms and the reform of the regulars, the nature of music-making permitted to female religious is central to any discussion about the freedoms and restrictions placed on women in convents in the early modern era.

Council of Trent and Women

In addition to concerns about women making music, the Council of Trent considered many other aspects of the lives of religious women worthy of reform. The most important, and the most constrained, was the issue of clausura. Concerns about enclosure did not begin with the Council of Trent; rather, like musical reform, the

pertaining decree was one segment in a continuum of increasing stricture reaching back several centuries and continuing into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the Middle Ages, female religious could be classified loosely by their living arrangements and missions. *Contemplatives* took public, solemn vows and lived in enclosed communities in cities and outside city walls in a quiet life based on the hermit tradition of extracting oneself from the world in order to concentrate on prayer and self-sacrifice; these communities could be male, female or mixed. *Active* communities, sometimes called “apostolics,” were less easily defined because of the range of living and working situations they adopted. Elisabeth Makowski refers to such groups as “semi- or quasi-religious” because they often took only private, simple vows giving them a lower status than their enclosed counterparts.¹⁷ One model that can be seen as a variation of the active community was that of the tertians— women who lived in loose-knit communities and provided social services: they fed the poor, worked in hospitals and ran schools. Some women, called *pinzochere*, wore the habit and worked in the community but continued to live in their familial homes as virgins. The unenclosed religious life appealed to many women, particularly those from poor families who could not afford the typically more expensive, enclosed institutions; however, the authorities constantly scrutinized this lifestyle because in the eyes of the law and social order, such women were not truly nuns but rather a sort of un-regulated “other” that needed close

¹⁷ Elisabeth Makowski, “Mulieres Religiosae, Strictly Speaking: Some Fourteenth-Century Canonical Opinions,” *Catholic Historical Review* 85/1 (Jan 1999): 1-15.

supervision. Despite the difficulties of this lifestyle, open communities flourished in the late Middle Ages.¹⁸

A woman who was not married and not protected by enclosure was seen as a threat to the social order. Since her status was defined by her virtue, the constant danger of not only rape, incest or molestation but also her own weak, feminine nature meant that she could not possibly serve God or the community chastely. A *group* of such women then, certainly spelled ruin for their families, the local authorities and the reputation of the town. Medieval authorities began the process of enclosing these women on the local level as secular and ecclesiastic leaders attempted to rectify the hazard of unrestrained women through their enclosure and reception of a devotional life. These efforts were protested by the heretofore-unenclosed women, many of whom had joined their particular house because of its social welfare mandate or its open status. As the local authorities sought to rein in female monastics, the affected women struggled to work around the new rules, pleading with both secular and ecclesiastical leaders that their services were vital to the stability of the towns and villages they served; much of this local, regional legislation was ignored, sometimes by the very authorities who enacted it.¹⁹

¹⁸ Katherine Gill, "Open Monestaries for Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy: Two Roman Examples," in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 15-48.

¹⁹ For further discussion of this complex issue, see Clifford H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edition (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2001); Craig Harline, "Actives and Contemplatives: The Female Religious of the Low Countries Before and After Trent," *Catholic Historical Review* 81/4 (Oct 1995): 541-68; Gene A. Brucker, "Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imaginations in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 41-62.

In 1298, the papacy made *clausura* for women religious into universal church law, superseding local conventions.²⁰ Boniface VIII's papal decree is known as *Periculoso*, after its opening word; it was included in an official compilation of papal legislation, his third book of the *Liber Sextus*.²¹

We do firmly decree by this present constitution which shall forever remain in force, that nuns collectively and individually, both at present and in future, of whatsoever community or order, in whatever part of the world they may be, ought henceforth to remain perpetually cloistered in their monasteries, so that none of them, tacitly or expressly professed, shall or may for whatever reason or cause ... have permission hereafter to leave their monasteries; and that no persons, in any way disreputable, or even respectable, shall be allowed to enter or leave the same ... so that [the nuns] be able to serve God more freely, wholly separated from the public and worldly gaze and, occasions for lasciviousness having been removed, may most diligently safeguard their hearts and bodies in complete chastity ... We strictly enjoin patriarchs, prelates, archbishops, and all bishops in virtue of holy obedience, under threat of divine judgment and the prospect of eternal damnation, that they take very diligent care that the nuns of any monasteries within their city or diocese subject to them by law as ordinaries and indeed even those that are immediately subject solely to the authority of the Roman church and apostolic see ... diligently enforce enclosure in those monasteries in which it is not observed as soon as they can properly provide for this.²²

Although the language strongly indicates that all female religious were required to be immediately closed off from the world, implementing the decree proved difficult and its enforcement was uneven, in part, because local authorities— despite harsh ecclesiastical and secular penalties— were unwilling to make the social sacrifice or meet

²⁰ This law was itself based on preceeding laws and regulations. For an overview of some of these, particularly as they applied to the status of the quasi-religious, see Makowski "Mulieres Religiosae."

²¹ The original manuscript can be found Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana Borghese 7, *Liber Sextus* f.56v. A facimile of the relevant folio is found in the prefatory material to Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women Periculoso and its Commentators, 1298-1545* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997). For the standard modern edition of the body of medieval canon law, see Emil Friedberg, ed., *Corpus iuris canonici* (Leipzig, 1879; reprinted Graz, 1959), *Periculoso*: vol. II, p.1053.

²² Makowski, *Canon Law*, 135-36; translation by the author.

the financial obligation required to build and support newly enclosed convents. New institutions seeking approval after this time in particular were charged with enclosure because they had no historical precedent or mandate already in effect; one result was that few new female religious communities were created in the late Middle Ages.

Periculoso, like its preceding and subsequent decrees, was targeted primarily towards female institutions—men faced lesser restrictions or none at all. This gender-specific mandate was publicized as a way to protect women from violence and pestilence but clearly emerged from a misogynistic perspective that encouraged the common view that women's natures were weak, unstable and licentious.²³ The fifteenth-century proverb 'aut virum, aut murum' (either a husband or a wall) echoes the essential binary that women faced as a result of the prevailing philosophy that women, even those with a religious mandate, could not be trusted to move about unrestricted.²⁴

While enclosure was desired by many authorities, the argument *against* enclosure was also voiced. This came most notably from open communities of female religious who valued their freedom and power as recognized members of their community, but objections were also made by their families who benefited from their visible presence; the city that relied on the work contributed by the women; and the city leaders, who had long used convents as part of their political and social authority. For these reasons,

²³ Several excellent discussions on the role of gender in the application of forced clausura have emerged in recent scholarship including Silvia Evangelisti, " "We Do Not Have it, and We Do Not Want It": Women, Power and Convent Reform in Florence" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34/3 (2003): 677-700; Francesca Medioli, "An Unequal Law: The Enforcement of *Clausura* Before and After Trent," in *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Christine Meek (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 136-52.

²⁴ As noted in Wendy M. Wright, "The Visitation of Mary: The First Years, (1610-18)," in *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation: In Honor of John C. Olin on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Richard L. DeMolen (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 220.

among others, *clausura* was rarely enforced as set forth in *Periculoso*, thus calling its historical significance into question. Patricia Ranft has argued that during this time, papal decrees carried very little weight and punishment for disobeying them was minimal; additionally, it was often the case that subsequent bulls and decrees overlapped or contradicted previous ones and requests for exceptions were expected. Often the rules as they were laid out were applied to individual cases more effectively than as a general rule.²⁵ Because of this haphazard application and enforcement, *clausura* would remain a thorn in the side of convents, but not one that necessarily inflicted pain.

In observing that *Periculoso* was not the “dramatic turning point” of female monasticism, Katherine Gill notes, “There was no steady progression toward stricter enclosure of religious women in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.”²⁶ This is a fair statement concerning the immediate, practical effects that *Periculoso* had as a law—there were certainly no *dramatic* results from its authorization, nor did it see widespread enforcement; however, over time, repeated strictures from various authorities gave leverage to the Council of Trent, which cited Boniface VIII’s *Periculoso* as precedent to their mandate of *clausura*. Bolstered by a general ambiance of reform and stricture, and citing the same ill effects arising from un-protected women, the Council of Trent took up the issue at the end of its final meeting.

²⁵ Patricia Ranft, *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 79-80.

²⁶ Katherine Gill, “*Scandala*: Controversies Concerning *Clausura* and Women’s Religious Communities in Late Medieval Italy,” in *Christendom and Its Discontents*, ed. Scott Waugh and Peter Diehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 199.

A review of the proceedings indicates that the delegates to the Council did not intend to effect change in every aspect of Catholic life but rather targeted those egregious areas most in need of reform. The decrees concerning female monastic institutions were relatively few in comparison to some of the reforms of the liturgy and ceremonial matters; the issues facing regulars were taken up at the end of the final session and were perhaps hurried because of the impending winter season. While most sessions were preceded by weeks and even months of closed-door discussions, the final session spent very little time before announcing the decrees for a vote before the general council.²⁷ Nonetheless, female monastics were considered a topic of crucial importance in the session titled the “Reform of the Regulars” in which are published twenty-two chapters concerning the regulation of the formation of Orders, their daily function, and their relationship to the larger community. Six chapters explicitly name women as the object of their concern, while five clearly concern only men and the remaining eleven apply to both.²⁸

The chapters that apply to houses of both men and women generally had very broad applications, or they were restatements or clarifications of pre-existing laws.²⁹ These progress from issues of eliminating worldly abuses, to internal and external monastic structures, to the act of becoming a regular, to the overseeing of the institutions’ conformity. These include Chapter I in which all regulars are directed to abide by the

²⁷ Jedin, *A History*, and Monson, “Council of Trent,” 20.

²⁸ Session twentieth-five, the “Reform of the Regulars,” was conducted in the late summer and fall of 1563.

²⁹ The following are my own summaries except where quoted. The Latin text and the English translations are found in Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 217-32.

Rule as they have vowed to do, specifically the vows of “obedience, poverty and chastity” and Superiors are instructed to enforce compliance; Chapter II concerns private ownership of “moveable or immovable property;” personal belongings are strictly forbidden, regulars may not have anything unessential but they will be provided with all things that are necessary; Chapter VI declares that community leaders (such as abbesses) must be chosen by “secret ballot” with no election fraud; Chapter VIII orders houses to be organized into congregations under appropriate jurisdiction of the bishop and the Apostolic See; Chapter XI directs the bishop to have ascendancy over all aspects of the curia; with Chapter XV the Council begins to deal with the process of professing by stating that no one may profess until they have worn the habit for a probationary year and have reached their sixteenth birthday; Chapter XIX requires that complaints of illegitimate profession must be announced within five years, no one may transfer from a strict order to one that is less strict; Chapter XX entails visitations to the monasteries by the appropriate superior; Chapter XXII concludes with a mandate that all institutions, regardless of their former status, must conform to the minimum rules of the Council.

Bishops were to put these mandates into effect “as soon as possible” with the support of secular leaders. The above summaries apply to both male and female houses and as the decrees were interpreted by the Medici family, they played an important role in the establishment, ceremonial function and practical organization of both the Order of Santo Stefano and the convent of La Concezione.

The rules specifically applying to men do not state that they were for “male orders only” although this was implied because women did not need regulation concerning

employment outside the monastery or other situations concerning regulars' behaviors beyond the walls. The regulations specifically concerning female houses are scattered throughout the session; the first is the most significant. Chapter V, "renewing the constitution of Boniface VIII," demands of the bishops "the enclosure of nuns be restored wherever it has been violated and that it be preserved where it has not been violated" with the "aid of the secular arm," requiring that no nun shall leave the monastery without the permission of the bishop. Under penalty of excommunication, no one is allowed to enter the monastery without the permission of the bishop or superior and this permission is to be granted only if it is necessary. Monasteries outside city walls should be moved inside to protect them from "evil men" again with the "aid of the secular arm."³⁰

There are two distinct types of restriction mentioned: "active" (nuns may not leave) and "passive" (no one may enter). The language specifically applied to those houses already enclosed, not to open communities, the supposition being that after 1298 there would be no open communities. The "aid of the secular arm" is invoked twice, implying that the Council knew that local leaders and the families of nuns would provide the greatest resistance to full enclosure. It is significant that the council made allowances for exceptions through the bishops in the case of leaving the monastery (and the bishop or the superior for other situations) because this clause permitted access to the convent to a variety of family members and friends, in addition to the confessors, priests, medical

³⁰ In the Council of Trent, *Canones et decreta*, 1564.

Nemini autem Sanctimonialium liceat post professionem exire a monasterio, etiam ad breue tempus, quocumque preaetextu, nisi ex aliqua legitima causa ab Episcopo approbanda: indultis quibuscumque & privilegiis non obstantibus... nel Superior licentiam debet in casibus necessariis; neque aliis ullo modo possit, etiam uigore cuiuscumque facultatiis, uel indulti hactenus concessi...

doctors and laborers who were probably the intended recipients of the clause. Likewise, the threats of anathema and excommunication were directed at civil authorities—if they failed to aid the bishop—and anyone who entered the cloister without proper authority. Such a severe punishment was certainly meant to convey the gravity with which the Council considered the matter.³¹

Chapter VII specifies that a woman may be elected to the highest position of the community only if she is forty years old and has lived faithfully in the community for eight years after her profession. It further states that no one may be the leader of more than one community, and that the bishop is not to break clausura but stand at the window to hear the results of the election. This chapter, distinct from the chapters applicable to both male and female monastics concerning the election of officials by secret ballot, appears to be designed to correct what may have been a common problem. Certainly, a woman who held significant power in more than one convent presented a problem, both because she would necessarily break enclosure frequently and because so much power concentrated in one woman— and by extension, one family— would necessarily concern city leaders. Additionally, the bishop was restricted from the enclosure during elections, as he was during other times, likely indicating the Council-members' perception that bishops had taken such a great interest in the outcomes of elections that they were

³¹ Anathema and excommunication were varying decrees of separating an individual from the community of the faithful; in practical terms, one who was excommunicated could not receive the sacraments and would die without the benefit of salvation. These punishments were levied by the Council of Trent for many heresies although the Council cautioned bishops to use the power “with moderation and great discretion.” Schroeder, *The Canons and Decrees*, 235-36. Twenty-fifth Session, Decrees Concerning Reform, Chapter III.

overseeing them too closely or intruding on the secrecy or the propriety of those elections.

Chapter IX was composed to re-organize the relationships between convents, their superiors and the papal hierarchy by requiring that female houses formerly subject primarily to the Apostolic See were to be under the jurisdiction of the local bishop, while those subject to the local male rule were to continue under the protection of their monastic superiors. This again illustrates the increasing power of bishops and archbishops as control was consolidated away from the many local religious and civil authorities towards a more centralized position in the papal hierarchy.

Chapter X clarifies that nuns, as stated in their constitutions, are to confess and take communion at least once a month. In addition, the superiors are to provide an “extraordinary” confessor to hear everyone two to three times a year. Confessors were regarded with a certain amount of suspicion; an “extra” or outside confessor (perhaps one chosen from the bishops’ flock?) ensured that one person would not hold total control over the spiritual well being of the women. The chapter also specifies that the “holy body of Christ” (i.e. the consecrated Host) must be kept in the public church rather than in the interior chapel. This last part is the most interesting as it illustrates the mistrust in which the enclosed chapel was held by the authorities. Leaving the host unprotected by the priest was an unacceptable risk; presumably, there was a fear that the sisters might undertake celebrating the Mass themselves or (mis)use holy objects in ways that were forbidden to them as women.

Chapter XVII decreed that a girl must be twelve years old before she could take the habit; and that at that time and again before her profession, she was to be examined by the bishop to ensure that she chose to take the veil freely— in order to determine “whether she has been forced or enticed or knows what she is doing.” In conjunction with this practice, the abbess was to be required to give the bishop a one-month notice before a girl’s profession. This chapter is the second most important reform for female monastics. It had long been a concern of the Church that girls were being given to the religious life without their consent, for the convenience of their families – sometimes as infants. The practice was so familiar that it was an accepted part of the culture, particularly for patrician families.³² The details of the “examination” are not given in the decree, only that that it must be done “carefully.”

Chapter XVIII forcefully proclaims that no one may force a virgin, a widow or any other woman to enter the religious life, nor keep her from it if it is her choosing. Anyone giving advice or aid to a girl encouraging her to enter the convent, as well as those institutions that accept a girl who has stated she does not enter freely was to be anathematized. As an addendum to the previous chapter, the Council was clearly interested in stating their displeasure with the status quo of forced monachization. This order punishes not only the superiors who do not conduct the “examination” mentioned in chapter sixteen (or conduct it improperly), or those who ignore the opportunity for

³² Gene A. Brucker, “Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imaginations in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 41-62. While no reliable figure exists, it is thought that between one-third and three-quarters of Florentine daughters were sent to the convent. Kelley Harness estimates that the figure about 1600 was one-half. Harness, *Echoes*, 282, fn.1.

renunciation of vows within the timeframe specified in chapter fifteen, but also any confessor or family member who disregards the wishes of the woman.

The statutes of the Council of Trent warrant attention as matters of significance both to the study of female religious in general and as they applied specifically to La Concezione because the Medici establishment specifically used the words of Trent to legitimize the convent as an institution reflecting reform. Florence, like other cities, was faced with the challenge of applying mandates that were an important part of the larger reform movement.

Monastic enclosure in particular proved to be difficult to enforce, requiring a subsequent order by Pope Pius V who in 1566 reiterated the message of Chapter V with the bull *Circa Pastoralis* that created further restrictions on female religious. The effect of this restriction was that “all women who were affiliated with a religious order through simple vows were now required to profess solemn vows and were therefore bound by enclosure.”³³ Open communities had escaped enclosure by stating that it did not apply to them because they never had it so it needed neither restoration or preservation; with this latest clarification, the loophole created by the vague language of Trent was seemingly closed. Previously, the term *monaca* was reserved for a woman who had taken the three solemn vows of obedience, poverty and chastity as a public statement of her commitment to the religious life; in stating that simple vows now conveyed the same status, *Circa Pastoralis* ensured that the debate about the intricate nature of devotion, contemplation and service would focus more on the lifestyle of the nun than her established spiritual

³³ Evangelisti, “We do not have it,” 681.

purpose.³⁴ Pius V also signaled a change in the fundamental definition of a “nun” with the *Lubricum genus* of the 1560s “which specified that all professed religious *must* take solemn (and thus perpetually binding) vows.”³⁵ These two overlapping ordinances were designed to define women religious more narrowly and to place greater restrictions on their choices.

The battle between the curia and female monastics continued to rage, placing bishops, the local authorities and the families of enclosed women squarely in the middle. Women or their family members often petitioned for exemptions or less rigid application of the rules; and while the secular leadership was sometimes amenable to such suggestions, ecclesiastical leaders were bound by the recent edicts, or at least by an interpretation of them. As the twenty-fourth of the Council of Trent session mandated, the bishops were responsible for interpreting and enforcing the decrees, and each enforced clausura to a greater or lesser degree in accordance with local tradition and political obligation creating immense friction in towns and cities across Europe.

Overseeing the dissemination and integrity of the synod’s conclusions was the Sacred Congregation of the Bishops and Regulars, which was created specifically to clarify the decrees concerning religious orders and to review petitions for exceptions. In the decades following Trent, musical petitions and requests for exceptions to clausura

³⁴ Gill, “*Scandala*: Controversies Concerning Clausura” and Craig Harline, “Actives and Contemplatives: The female religious of the low countries before and after Trent,” *Catholic Historical Review* 81/4 (October 1995): 541-68.

³⁵ Wright, “The Visitation of Mary,” 218-19. Italics original to the quote.

were routinely submitted, and were often denied.³⁶ While it is clear— judging by repeated admonitions and convent records— that musical practices continued behind closed doors, clausura remained an issue of contention: in 1616, forced to confront the issue of open communities, the Congregation declared of tertiaries (communities of women who were not cloistered) “they are not approved, even if they are tolerated.”³⁷ While the statement is vague, it indicates that resistance to enclosure was more than a fight of words— it was one of openly defiant actions. This was the case for music as well—even in dioceses such as Bologna where convent music was tightly controlled by the bishop, it seems to have flowed through the grates more freely than was officially allowed.³⁸

Clausura had drastic variations in its ideology, execution and effectiveness. Many of these differences were based on the regional application of the decrees while others highlighted a gendered disparity. In Italy and Spain, clausura was more strictly adhered to than in France where its application was determined more by local preference than a universal church law would seem to imply. As Francesca Medioli points out, “clausura” meant different things when it was observed by men or by women.³⁹ Architecturally, the

³⁶ Monson mentions the plethora of petitions for musicians, teachers and instruments found in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV) in comparison to the very few sent to the Sacred Congregation of the Council for non-Order supplications. Monson, “Council of Trent Revisited,” 26-28.

³⁷ “Non si approvano, se ben si tollerano” Quoted in Medioli, “An Unequal Law,” 137 and Gabriella Zarri, “Monasteri femminili e città (secoli XV-XVIII),” in *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, ix, *La Chiesa e il potere politico*, Giorgio Chittolini, Giovanni Miccoli eds. (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 357-429.

³⁸ Craig A. Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

³⁹ Medioli, “An Unequal Law,” 140-41.

edificial complex of a convent and a monastery might be very similar: a wall surrounded open space for a courtyard or garden with a central building, which was divided among living quarters, and communal space with a significant portion dedicated to the sacred obligations of the institution.⁴⁰ The chapel found in men's houses had a section reserved for the monastics—their presence was seen and heard by all. Chapels associated with female houses, however, had an enclosed space for the female religious that was connected to the main chapel only through a grated window. This meant that while sound could flow freely between public and private spaces, there was no visual connection to the sounds, thus isolating the sisters from the community at large and – physically, at least – from the priest as well. While male institutions might choose to reside in the countryside, away from the bustle of the city, most women's institutions were near or inside the city walls in order to “protect” their safety and the virtue of the inhabitants; conceivably this had the unintended effect of serving as a constant reminder for women enclosed against their will that they were so close to the sounds and sights of city life yet they had no ability to experience them. Conversely, the close proximity of the convent made frequent contact with family members more feasible. Regular contact with the outside world was also a significant factor in the musical life of the community, a topic that will be addressed in Chapter Three.

These examples highlight how men and women observed clausura differently. Men chose to take the habit of a cloistered order so that they might be physically

⁴⁰ Helen Hills, *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

separated from worldly cares and temptations in order to engage in serious contemplation; women had fewer options concerning the type of house they would inhabit for the remainder of their lives. As most were strictly cloistered, nuns' enclosure represented a forced separation— they could hear the world, but they could not live in it.

Forced Monachization

Although reformers endeavored to ensure that all enclosed women chose to live as monastics, not every inhabitant of the convent was there because she felt called by God to reside in the cloister. The topic of “forced monachization” has had a powerful effect on our understanding of the history of women and the ways they navigated the social structure. While it certainly existed in the Middle Ages and into the nineteenth century, compelling (or forcibly encouraging) a daughter to join a convent became a routine part of familial strategy for female offspring between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. From a legal standpoint, a woman who entered the convent was no longer part of her birth family. She was neither entitled to an inheritance from her father's estate nor from her mother's dowry; she was not able to hold any legal standing as an individual or a member of her family; also, she was not entitled to any property of her own. In becoming a ‘bride of Christ,’ she relinquished her secular rights and any dowry or chattels that came with her became the property of her house or the church. While numerous women did choose this path as an alternative to marriage or as a spiritual calling, there is overwhelming evidence that many women were given to the church not of their own free will, but through the will of their families.

Despite repeated admonitions from the Church hierarchy that women must enter the religious life freely, in reality such laws had even less effect than those requiring clausura. This issue pitted families with economic, political or financial incentives to put a daughter in the convent against ecclesiastical authorities who were duty bound to ensure that the girls freely chose the habit. This left secular authorities to legislate from the outside and effectively eliminated the voice of the daughter.

There were points in the process during which the girl was supposed to be queried regarding her desires. When she entered for her novitiate, she was asked if she took the habit freely, and she was asked again at her profession a year later; to my knowledge, no instance has been found in any convent or secular record in which a girl replied that she did not wish to take the habit and was then released from the life. If the questioning was a formality, then the answer given did not necessarily affect the outcome; alternatively, perhaps the girls answered in the affirmative because they felt they had no other option. (It is also possible that records of girls who gave negative answers and left the convent were destroyed to eliminate any evidence of uncertainty, both for the sake of the religious institution and for the honor of the girl's family.)

Certainly, a young girl could have been pressured by her family or confessor to answer that she chose to profess freely because it was her obligation to her family or to God. Entering a convent was often presented to a woman as an opportunity to bring honor to her family; it was a privilege to be married to Christ and to serve as an intermediary between heaven and earth. If she said that she did not choose to become a nun, her options for a respectable life at that point were greatly diminished. It seems

doubtful that this situation arose frequently, it may have been in the best interest of the girl to make her home in the convent and it was in the best interest of her family to make her life as comfortable as they could.⁴¹ From a religious-philosophical perspective, it is questionable whether the prayers and interjections of a woman without a desire for the religious life were as potent as the prayers from one who chose the life. It appears that this complication had little impact on families' decisions.

Numerous contemporary accounts exemplify the anguish of daughters who were not only enclosed against their will but who continued to fight against their imposed lifestyle. One of the most famous is the polemical manifesto of Arcangela Tarabotti, a seventeenth-century writer/political theorist forcibly enclosed in a Venetian convent; the first part, entitled "Paternal Tyranny," renounces her personal forced enclosure as well as that of any other woman who was tricked, betrayed or berated into the habit.⁴² Tarabotti oscillates between unbridled, venomous accusations and cunning arguments citing Biblical texts, ecclesiastical statutes, and contemporary and classic literature.

Some fathers among you seek and excuse by saying that since evil has increased so much in the world today, it is necessary to remove women from danger to the safety of a convent. I don't understand how you who profess to be Solomons in the flesh can be so stupid as to use evidence suitable for the nursery to defend you iniquity—I can't listen to it without

⁴¹ One famous example is the character of Gertrude, the "nun of Monza" in Manzoni's 1827 novel about a seventeenth-century girl who revolted against the religious life and was released. The novel exposes a life-long psychological conditioning that encouraged girls to accept the veil. This included dolls of nuns, repeated stories of her future life and after arriving home having been released— her father treated her harshly until she submitted to being sent back to the convent. The character is based on the real life of Marianna de Leyva, known as Suora Virginia. Alessandro Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi*, The Harvard Classics (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14, 2001); Marion Faringer Freidson, "The Meaning of Gertrude in *I Promessi Sposi*," *Italica* 28/1 (March 1951): 27–32.

⁴² Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. and trans. by Letizia Panizza (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

laughing! How dare you argue that you push women in the cloister because they are more shameless than ever, that as the world has reached a maximum of sinfulness, women are proving more unfaithful and wicked day by day? Rubbish! Yet I grant you that the world has grown worse in one respect: you force young women to become nuns when death itself is preferable.⁴³

Supporting one of her reoccurring allegations, Tarabotti argues that the misogynistic Venetian patriarchy treated women as the lowest form of humanity by using convents as dumping grounds for unwanted daughters, including illegitimate births, ugly, deformed and mentally disabled children; Arcangela herself had a physical deformity that kept her from the marriage market. The trope that daughters were safer in convents was dissatisfying according to Tarabotti because the enclosed life was the worst form of torment for one who did not choose it freely. Indeed, she compared herself to a character from the writings of Dante:

Only Hell itself bears a likeness to the suffering of these enforced slaves of Christ. Over the gate of Hell, Dante says, are inscribed the words “Abandon every hope, who enter here” [“Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’entrate” (Inf. 3.9)] ... This is an incomparable, if not incomprehensible torment. In like fashion, these enforced nuns experience a short Hell in this life as a prelude to the eternal Hell they are doomed to endure on account of your cruelty.⁴⁴

Transforming the image of the ‘bride of Christ’ into the “slave of Christ” certainly was meant to enrage a church that saw itself as a Christ-like guardian of female religious whose sacrifice was both necessary and merited. However, for Tarabotti, forced enclosure was a vicious ploy condemning both the church fathers and the enclosed women to future torments:

⁴³ Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, Book 2, 117-18.

⁴⁴ Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, Book 1, 65.

Oh, you wicked hypocrites, you devils incarnate, not unlike your master in hell, your feigned expressions, your calculated betrayals, your false promises and all the rest, as only you know better! Not for nothing is the word “demon” (demone) of the masculine gender, as if the female sex does not deserve to have attributed to it any of the names of Hell’s infernal monsters.⁴⁵

Tarabotti peppered her writings with imagery of Hell and death, reminding the church fathers of the retributions they imparted in promulgating their laws. Under the decrees of the Council of Trent, the punishment for forcing a woman into a convent against her will, was just that—excommunication and denial of heavenly entrance. In the following passage, Tarabotti argues that the Council of Trent had in mind only to enclose those women whose hearts were determined to follow the religious path and that to consign a girl against her will was an abomination to God.

Let me proclaim loud and clear, once and for all, that I know that those holy impeccable fathers, gathered in the sacred consistory inspired by the Holy Spirit who guided their every decision established a most holy decree in setting up convents of nuns an institution more divine than human. But one must grasp the implications of their divinely inspired doctrines: they speak of women who are determined to enter the religious life of their own free wills, called only by God and not under human constraint. These women are full of heavenly grace as they sigh and weep to be admitted with their heavenly groom to that place apart longed for by the bride in the Song of Songs. Inebriated by the Holy Spirit, they bestow the name of the Paradise on the convent, and the name of Heaven on their cells in which, surpassing their human nature, they are transformed into godlike creatures.

It is for nuns like these the Council of Trent’s Holy Father’s ordained lifelong enclosure; their sublime intellects were sure that perpetual separation from the world would not prove harsh to such innocent hearts eager to follow their groom. If you do not believe this is true, read the fulminations and excommunications directed at those who would inveigle, entice, or persuade any young girl to become a nun.

⁴⁵ Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, Book 2, 121-22.

From this think through, you who are mere men, what sort of punishment will fall upon those cursed by God who not only entice but force wretched girls to don the religious habit, using frightful threats added to an intransigent determination. They show no respect for God or the saints, disguising their wicked intentions behind decrees of pontiffs and councils that they have not understood and still less observed. They bring forth the weighty judgments of the Council of Trent, which, working piously in all things, and especially in the present matter, grasped only too well that there is no greater offense before God than forcibly denying to His creatures that unconditional freedom of will that He Himself granted to them. In confirmation of the above, let it be known that when the sacred cardinals resolved to impose *clausura* on monasteries, they promulgated an edict about women who did not give their spontaneous consent to be enclosed for life: it was said they could freely depart without any guilt or fault or shame whatsoever. I take this as another sign or rather incontrovertible proof that one must not offer to God in sacrifice bound bodies, but loving hearts.⁴⁶

In this, one of her most powerful contentions, Tarabotti separates the decrees of the Council of Trent from their application. She does not fault the Council, noting their good judgment and “sublime intellect,” rather she blames the local leadership for its failure to act in accordance with the decrees. In invoking the Council of Trent in this manner, she reminds fathers, confessors and bishops alike that under papal law, forced monachization is punishable by excommunication. Continuing this strategy, Tarabotti condemns those who misused the fail-safe of the required examination of the young virgin.

The rules governing the entry of young girls into the religious life require them to beg and beseech to be admitted and, furthermore, that they spend whole years inside to test their vocations. If they prove unfit, they leave the convent free. These requirements are not put into practice nowadays. As long as they take the veil, “everything’s all right.” No matter how much they protest, their prayers and tears are in vain. So they go through the rites in appearance only; they embrace Jesus, their bridegroom,

⁴⁶ Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, Book 2, 119-20.

feigning the ceremony; they offer Him their hearts mouthing the words, in fact belonging still in the world.⁴⁷

In Chapter XVII of the Council's decrees, an examination is stated as a requirement, as is a year of contemplation before taking final vows; yet just a few decades after the Council, Tarabotti claims that the rules favored by the patriarchy were enforced and those not convenient were ignored. The two examples above explicitly indicate that the Council of Trent's rules were available to a wider readership than to just the authorities; while Tarabotti's level of literacy was probably beyond many of her contemporaries, it was quite common for wealthy convents to have high literacy rates and religious writings would have been encouraged reading materials.⁴⁸ Certainly, if Tarabotti had read the edicts promulgated by the Council, she had access to them in her convent; it seems likely that church fathers would have wanted convents to know the new rules, if for no other reason than because they effectively ended the debate on clausura. In support of the notion that the women were familiar with the decrees, *La Concezione* provides an example of one way that church fathers ensured that the women had read the decrees: important sections were incorporated into their Constitution, a document that would have been known well to the inhabitants, their superiors and their families.

A counterpart to the notion of forced monachization is provided by evidence of girls who used the convent as an escape from the secular world that would have required

⁴⁷ Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, Book 3, 130.

⁴⁸ Kate Lowe, "Women's Work at the Benedictine Convent of Le Murate in Florence: Suora Battista Carucci's Roman Missal of 1509," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, eds. Jane Taylor and Leslie Smith (London: British Library; Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Sharon T. Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence," in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead (New York: Garland, 1999), 3-46.

them to be wives and mothers. As the Catholic church reinforced the idea that sex was not for pleasure and was a sin that had to be tolerated for the sake of reproduction, perhaps some women wished to avoid the disdainful act completely; also, there are accounts of lesbian relationships in convents, and it is plausible to assume that some girls asked their families to take the religious habit rather than endure a man.⁴⁹ Other girls, perhaps more interested in learning or the arts, may have preferred life in a convent where they would be able to explore their interests free from secular women's responsibilities.⁵⁰ This view of monastic life—that there were certain freedoms that came with enclosure—has become popular with musicologists, art historians and literary critics who take into account works of creativity as expressions of self that could not have been possible in a society that prized women as mothers and good spouses devoted to their husbands' careers rather than as producers of cultural products in their own right.⁵¹ It is likely that women on both sides of the grate occasionally gazed upon their counterparts with a sort of awe; one may have wanted nothing more than to be able to walk outside the walls of her convent, the other may have desired those same walls as a source of purpose and protection.

⁴⁹ Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵⁰ E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, eds. *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Craig A. Monson, ed. *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

⁵¹ This has even extended to popular literature, see Sarah Dunant's historical novel, *The Birth of Venus: Love and Death in Florence* (London: Little, Brown, 2003; reprinted New York: Random House, 2004) in which a teenage girl, consigned to an awkward arranged marriage, spends much of her life in a convent where she is free to pursue books and painting as she wishes.

None of the documents located in the Florentine state archives or extant in the libraries investigated in the course of the current project contain any documentation that indicates whether or not the women of La Concezione truly chose the monastic life or whether it was strongly suggested or even forced upon them. It is known that the Medici princess Maria Cristina probably suffered a defect that made her less desirable on the marriage market, but it is not known whether she had the mental capacity to choose an unmarried state for herself. An unusual exception for La Concezione, Maria Cristina did not profess but lived in a semi-permanent state of residence in which she frequently left her apartment in the cloister to join her family in the countryside, as a non-professed woman, she circumvented the examination and rules associated with being a female religious.⁵²

Like all early modern convents, La Concezione was a product of its location, economic status and religious directive. The ways in which this convent reflected the religious upheaval of the time are visible in its documents—those circulating within the walls and those external to its boundaries.

Applying Trent to La Concezione

La Concezione was a political contrivance of the Medici family— Eleonora de Toledo, Cosimo I and Ferdinando I each ensured that the convent would serve the Florentine court's strategy of becoming a powerful center in the new political and devotional climate by coordinating the founding and the opening ceremonies to coincide

⁵² See the Introduction, pages 28-29 for more on Maria Cristina.

with significant political events while invoking important religious tenets. Successive dukes would continue to rely on La Concezione as part of the family and court enclave; the full implications of this will be discussed below in Chapter Two.

When Eleonora composed her will from her deathbed in December 1562, she was well aware of ongoing religious reforms and that the Council of Trent's deliberations that had begun decades before were about to conclude.⁵³ As the decrees concerning female piety and monastic enclosure were about to be released for implementation, she emblazoned onto paper a convent of the exact model proposed by the church fathers. This enabled Florence to be a leading city in this matter—the ink on the decrees had not even dried before a strictly enclosed convent for the wealthy virgins of the court was established in the city center under the direct protection of the ruling family. It firmly proclaimed the Medici family's compliance with the new, “reformed” church and aligned the Duke and Tuscany with the Pope in the newly devout climate. The primary formal documents of the convent—the Constitution and the Charter— support the thesis that the reforms of the Council of Trent played a significant role in establishing and running the convent.⁵⁴

⁵³ Gabriele Paleotti had already drafted the language for the enclosure of nuns for the Council of Trent by autumn 1562. Monson, “Council of Trent,” 20. Ambasciadore de'Principi secondo il di, che giunsero: Giovanni Strozza Fior[enza], Amb[asciatore] Del Duca di Fiorenza. As the Medici court representative at Trent, he corresponded frequently with the Duke keeping him abreast of developments; Cosimo in turn may well have shared this information with his devout and politically minded consort, Eleonora de Toledo.

⁵⁴ The Constitution: BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, “Costituzioni e Ordini del ven[erabile]. Monastero della Concettione della S[anta] Vergine Maria, chiamato il Monastero Nuovo, in via della Scala di Firenze: con approvazione del 3 ottobre 1655 e con modificazioni del 1750.” The Charter: ASPi 2878. “Il Cerimoniere Pratico ovvero un esatto Trattato delle funzioni Pontificali dafarsi dal Prelato dell Ordine Militare di S[anto] Stefano Papa e Martire: nella Chiesa delle Monache della Santo Stefano Concezione di Firenze. Tomo Secondo.”

It is significant that Grand Duchess Eleonora de Toledo de' Medici chose the foundation of a convent as part of her beneficiary legacy. It was most certainly a political statement intertwined with the objectives of her husband, Cosimo I; however, the timing of the primary formal plan for the convent was dictated primarily by the unanticipated demise of the Duchess. It is clear that the foundation of the convent and at least some of the details concerning its orientation and use were pre-planned: Eleonora knew what form she wished the convent to take, what class of women would live there, what Rule they would follow; she wanted to ensure that the caretakers and patrons would all be derived from the court and that the original endowment would come from her personal finances and belongings.

Not only did the founding of the convent coincide with the end of the meetings of the Council of Trent: the convent's opening ceremonies corresponded with the appointment of a Florentine Pope. In composing the preface to the Constitution of La Concezione in 1592, the author explicitly linked the convent to the decrees and policies of the Council of Trent and to the newly elected Pope Clement VIII.

Being that in order to maintain and augment Communities and Republics – both ecclesiastical and secular – there does not exist any more necessary thing than good laws and statutes, proportional and accommodated to the condition and states of the people that, following those [laws and statutes], have to govern and rule themselves; and being that to every Monastery and Congregation – even those of [the] female sex – is suited this title of Community and Religious Republic, wisely the Serene Ferdinando, First [sic] Grand Duke of Tuscany, in founding the new Monastery of the Santissima Concezione on Via della Scala of Florence – which he founded following the order of his Serene Parents— gave orders that Chapters and Constitutions be created, for the good rule and governance of the nuns who would profess themselves there; and made it so that such chapters and constitutions by commission of Pope Clement VIII, were managed,

corrected and approved by the Sacred Congregation of the Eminent Cardinals in charge of the Regulars, and were confirmed by the same Holy Pontiff together with the institution, and foundation of the said Monastery. But because changes of time, of people, and circumstances require modification of Orders, Statutes, and Constitutions, the same Holy Pontiff with much prudence in the confirmation Bull, reserved, and permitted to the Serene Grand Duke of Tuscany, Grand Master of the Military Religion of Santo Stefano Pope and Martyr under which said Monastery is instituted, and to the Illustrious and Reverend Monsignor Prior of the Conventual Church of the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano of Pisa who will be [ruling] at the time, to make any ordinances, and Constitutions, that is legitimate, honest, and not contrary to the sacred Canon [law] and Apostolic Constitutions, nor [contrary] to the decrees of the Sacred Council of Trent; and – both those Chapters that have already been made/instituted, as well as those that may be made/instituted [in the future] – [may] change, reform, correct, institute new ones in part or in whole; as many times as the circumstances of the times and of the things and of the people will seem to require it; as long as [such changes] are then approved and confirmed by the Holy Apostolic See ... considering that said Chapters that were made [during] its foundation are scarce in setting out the rules.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Proemio.

Essendo che per mantenimento, e augumento delle Comunità, e Republiche ta[nt]o Ecclesiastiche quanto secolari non e[siste] cosa più necessaria quanto le buone leggi, e statuti, proporzionati e accomodati alla condizione, e stati delle persone che secondo quelli devono governarsi, e reggersi, E essendo che a ogni Mona[ster]o e Cong[regant]e an[che] di sesso femminile si conviene questo titolo di Comunità, e Republica Religiosa sapientissimamente il Ser[enissi]mo Ferdinando Primo Gran duca di Toscana, nella Fondazione del Mona[ster]o nuovo della S[antissi]ma Con[cezione], in Via della Scala di Firenze, da lui d'ordine de suoi Ser[enissi]mi Genitori fondato; dette ordine che fussero formati Capitoli, e Consituzioni, per il buon reggimento, e governo delle Mon[ach]e che vi dovevano professarsi, e procurò che tali capitoli, e costituzioni di commissione di Papa Clemente Ottavo, fossero riuisti, corretti e approvati dalla sacra Cong[regazione]delli Emintent[issi]mi Cardinali sopra i Regolari, e dall'istesso sommo Pontefice confermati insieme con la istituzione, e fondazione del medesimo Mona[ster]o. Ma perche la variazione de tempi delle persone, e delli accidenti ricerca variazione di Ordini Statuti, e Costituzione, il medesimo Sommo Pontefice con molta provvidenza nella Bolla di detta confermazione, riseruò, e concesse al Ser[enissi]mo Gran Duca di Toscano, Gran Maestro della Religione militare di Santo Stefano Papa e Martire sotto la quale e istituito detto Mona[ster]o e all'Ill[ustrissi]mo e Reveren[dissi]mo: Mons[ignor] Priore della Chiesa Conventuale de Cavalieri di Santo Stefano di Pisa che per i tempi saranno, di fare qualunque ordinazione, e Costituzione, leciti, e onesti non contrarij a sacri Canon, e Costituzione Apostoliche, ne a decreti del Sacro Concilio di Trento e tanto i detti capitoli fatti, quanto quelli da farsi, mutarli, riformarli correggerli, e di nuovo farli in tutto, o in parte, tante volte, quante le qualità de tempi, delle cose, e delle persone parrà che lo ricerchi, pure che sieno [aprovate], e confermate dalla S[an]ta Sedia Apostolica ... considerando che i detti Capitoli fatti nella sua fondazione sono scarsi nell'ordinare.

The author clearly intended to write this part of an otherwise internal document in such a way that it would withstand public scrutiny by invoking powerful symbols of Christianity. As an introduction to the chapters on comportment and convent rules, this paragraph incorporated the important (public) aspects of the new institution, including an acknowledgment of the reigning Duke (and future Dukes in a similar capacity), the supervision of Santo Stefano, the approval of Pope Clement VIII, the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation of Regulars and the guidance of the Council of Trent.

Notably missing are the more private aspects, such as the role of Eleonora as the catalyst for the founding, any part taken by the families of the sisters and any active role played by the inhabitants. The latter can be attributed to a cultural disconnect between men who make rules and decisions and women who abide by them dutifully. As to the role of the foundress, Eleonora is not completely eliminated—the author refers to the parents of the duke as those who ordered the creation of the convent, which then fell to their second ducal son; her significance is better highlighted in other documents and elsewhere within the Constitution. The preamble establishes the authority of the Duke, and by extension the cavalieri, to govern the convent as they see fit— short of contradicting the broad applications of the legislation. Of all of the necessary components to a new convent, perhaps the most important is omitted here: nowhere in this preamble is evoked the benefice of God. In fact, it is not until the chapters begin in earnest that God is mentioned, and then it is in the dedication of the institution: *La Immacolata Concettione*

della Santissima Genitrice di Dio Maria sempre Vergine.⁵⁶ Similarly, the preface to the Charter emphasizes the components of patrons and papacy and includes as one of its aims the glory of God but it neglects the role of the Council of Trent or the culture of reform.

We therefore, under the successfully reigning Clement VIII Holy Pontiff on this day the 14th of May, 1588, deliberately with our sure skill and resolute spirit, and with the fullness of our ducal authority in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the always blessed Virgin Mary, beholden to the pleasure of the Apostolic See and under the conditions stated below— [we] erect, found, constitute and endow the Monastery of Sisters under the Rule of Saint Benedict and under the invocation of the Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the city of Florence on the street called della Scala; to which monastery, to the honor and glory of God and in suffrage of the Spirit of our parents and our spirit— we bestow and freely give, as a pure, true and irrevocable donation, the title to those ample rooms transformed into a most convenient monastery, together with the church that we have built in said place.⁵⁷

Taking into account both the Constitution, written for the internal use, and the Charter for use by the superiors of Santo Stefano, allows for a more complete understanding of the forces that were important to the convent than can be gained by reading only one *proemio*.

References to the Council of Trent are found elsewhere throughout the Constitution and the Charter—its role is largely one of guidance and direction. The

⁵⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Primo: Delli Obblighi, Efeuzioni, e Privilegi del Mona[ster]o secondo al sua Fondazione, p.5.

⁵⁷ ASP 2878, Proemio.

... Noi dunque (regnando felicemente clemente [ottavo] sommo Pontefice) in questo giorno 14 Maggio 1588. deliberatamente di nostra certa Scienza, ed anime risoluto, e con là pienezza della nostra potestà ducale nel nome d[e]l Padre, del Figliuolo, e dello Spirito santo, della Beatissima sempre Vergine Maria, si serva to il Beneplacito della S[anta] Sede Apostolica e sotto le condizioni infrascritte regghiamo, fondiamo, costituiamo, e dotiamo in [il] Monastero di Monache sotto la Regola di S[an] Benedetto, e sotto l'invocazione della Concezione della Beatissima Vergine Maria nella Citta di Firenze in via e [chiamata La] Scala. Al qual monastero a onore e gloria di Dio, e in suffragio d[e]l Anime de' nostri Parenti e dell'Anima nostra, doniamo e liberamente diam[o] [per] titolo di pura, [vera] e [irrevocabile] donazione quell'ampie stanze rido[t]te a una con[venien]tissima forma di Mona[ster]o insieme con la Chiesa da noi edificata in detto luogo. ...

convent's hierarchies, both male and female members, were well aware of their responsibility to act as a model of post-Tridentine policy. The Medici establishment as author of the documents not only used the name and the authority of the Council, but also invoked the larger proclivity towards reform in establishing the policies and the public front as seen in the documents of the convent and the Order and as is evident through convent-community interactions. Surely, the founders, superiors, and inhabitants had a vested interest in maintaining the convent as a holy place, since it served Florence and its citizens with sacrifice and prayers; but was their interest in promoting Florentine perfection in light of the Council of Trent equal to this divine endeavor?

The Council of Trent never directly established a model for a female religious institution through its decrees. Rather as seen above, it clarified activities that were prohibited, and created guidelines pertaining to ritual and practical matters. However, tangential documents concerning the thoughts of the reformers that were not included in the approved decrees do give indication of the qualities that such an institution should embody.

As the Medici deciphered the reforms, the qualifications of a model post-Tridentine female monastic institution could be largely understood to exist in two categories: those issues that were externally visible to the world and those that dealt primarily with internal matters within the institution.⁵⁸ La Concezione represented the model institution in both senses. From an external perspective it was an enclosed

⁵⁸ The topic of image formation and “public” versus “private” space will be further developed in Chapter Five.

community— conforming to clausura; it followed the Benedictine Rule, one of the oldest and most respected Orders; it required the profession of the three monastic vows as a public act; it was situated within the city walls where it, and its inhabitants, could be protected by city leaders; and perhaps most publicly, it sustained its elite status through connections with the upper echelons of Florentine society.

From an internal or less publicly visible perspective, the doctrines of the Constitution and the Charter for the daily operations of the convent conformed to the rules established by the decrees of the Council of Trent. In fact, the correspondence between the wording of the Tridentine statutes and that of the governing documents of La Concezione is all but letter perfect, indicating that the authors were keen to duplicate without variant the decrees pertaining to female monastics. These included mandates for the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; regulations for clausura with specific rules for the parlor and the gate or anywhere there was a grate allowing for partial access; the process for election of the abbess; the prerequisites for entrance, including the age limit and examination; confession and the sacraments; the visitation of the superiors; and the role of local leadership—the archbishop, the duke and the government agents called the *operai* and *deputati*.

The first of these— the three vows of obedience, poverty and chastity— were obviously a priority of the Council of Trent because they constituted the first chapter in the twenty-fifth session. In the Constitution, the chapter on poverty is quite lengthy in sharp contrast to the chapters on chastity and obedience, which say comparatively little

on the matters other than that they were mandatory.⁵⁹ In obedience to the Council's decrees (session twenty-five Chapters II and III), the convent's documents state that the sisters of La Concezione were not to have or hold in their possession anything superfluous, especially anything illicit, vain or expensive; all things were to be held communally rather than by individuals. The Constitution regarded gifts to individuals from family members or others as potentially dangerous and they were to be strictly regulated by the abbess.⁶⁰

The emphasis unequally placed on poverty in the Constitution mirrors the decrees. Chapters II, III and XVI stress the vow of poverty by delineating what property was allowed or forbidden as well as the rights of ownership should a member leave the community. Neither chastity nor obedience is discussed in such detail.

⁵⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Ottavo: Del Voto di Obbedienza in particolare, p.28-31.

... Il Voto di Obb[edienz]a obbliga a tre cose, prima a adempire i precetti della Regola, Secondo a non fare contro la Regola o contro i precetti de superiori per disprezzo, Terzo a esquire tutto ciò, che il Superiore comanda secondo la Reg[ol]a e Instituto del Mona[ster]o e se il Sup[er]ior]e e tale che possi...

Capitolo Decimo: Del Voto di Castità, p.44.

...Sarebbe inpertinenza il dichiarare qui come, e quando le Mon[ach]e peccano contro la Castità, nel modo che aviamo dichiarato gli altri voti, poi che i peccati che in questa materia si commettono, o con pensieri, o con parole, o con opere illecite, da per se stessi si fanno conoscere, e difficilmente puo darsi persona tanto cieca e ignorante che non conosca quando mancassi in questo voto, all'osserva n[ost]ra del quale stimeremmo fare ingiuria alle Mon[ach]e se l'esortassimo, poiche per questo principalmente sono Monache e separate dal Mondo.

⁶⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Nono: Del Voto del Poverta, p.31-44.

1. Il Voto di Poverta consiste, in tre cose, cioè, nel non uolere avere, ne tenere, ne possedere cosa alcuna in propio; nel non avere ne tenere di superfluo al suo stato e bisogno, E nell'avere ogni cosa a comune con l'altre. 3. L'avere superfluo non si deve intendere, intanto rigore che la persona Religiosa non possi tenere appresso di se e per suo uso, se non l'estrema necessità, ma vuol dire che ella no tenga cose disdicevoli, e inconvenienti al suo stato come cose illecite, o vane, o di gran prezzo... 14. Confermiamo l'uso introdotto, e per molti anni osservato, che a parenti, o a qualunque altre persone di fuori, non si faccino donativi, ne presenti, se non di cose di devozione o commestibili, o il più a serve, servitori, o Contadini di nastri, cordelline, rete di refe, aghetti, e simili cose di poca valuta, e non di vanita mondana, e secolare quali espressamente proibiamo farsi ancora alle Spose parenti, etiam che dessero grosse mance.

Issues of *clausura* are paramount in the Constitution (but notably mitigated in the Charter) and often concern points of entry such as the gate and parlor. The relevant chapters are considerable in their length, and particularly in the chapter titled “*clausura*,” in their redundancy.⁶¹ Most of the rules in the Constitution concerning *clausura* focus on limiting interactions traversing the wall.

1. Let the Monastery be so well enclosed in brick, that by no neighbor can it be overseen within, nor may the sisters be seen, and if this should happen because of high walls made by the neighbors, let one make recourse to the Serene Grand Master, and let all possible action be taken in order to impede such a thing...

11. Except the Superior and the Confessor, with just cause, others are not to be led through the Monastery, any more than is necessary for their ministry, but they shall lead him directly to the place where there is need.⁶²

Whereas *active* enclosure forbids sisters to leave, the *passive* enclosure described here restricts outsiders from interacting with the community, even if only by viewing the women. Not explicitly discussed in this chapter are any rules concerning whether the women must stay solely inside the walls; however, the idea that the sisters were permanently enclosed permeates the Constitution from the preamble, to the solemn vows, to the responsibilities of the abbess and to the other office holders.

⁶¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Vendecimo: Della Clausura, e Porte del Monasterio, p.45-53. Capitolo duodecimo: Delle Grate del Parlatorio, p.53-55; Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55-59.

⁶² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Vendecimo: Della Clausura, e Porte del Monasterio, p.45-53.

1. Il Mona[ster]o sia così bene cinto di mura, che da nessuno vicino possi esser dominato di dentro, ne vedute le Mon[ach]e, e quando questo succedessi per muraglie che facessero i vicini, si ricorra al Ser[enissi]mo Gran Maestro, e si facci ogni di licenza per impedir tal cosa... 11. Eccettuato il Sup[er]ior]e e il Padre Confessore, con giuste cause, gli altri non si menino per il Mona[ster]o, se non tanto quanto e necessario per loro mestiero, ma li menino dirittamente a luoghi dove bisogna...

One of the few explicit statements requiring the women to remain within the walls comes in the chapter concerning the number of women that were to be accepted and the different classes of sisters, “enclosure has always been understood not as much for the Servant Sisters as for those of the Choir [professed sisters].”⁶³ This suggests that dealing with the outside world was a chore that the ennobled sisters of the choir should not have to do, leaving it instead for the servants. Likely, this rule was designed to enable the convent to interact with farmers, market sellers and artisans to obtain provisions, rather than to allow servants contact with family and friends denied to the veiled sisters.

When the sisters wished to speak to outsiders, there were very particular rules about when and where this activity could take place, what was required, and what the consequences were for disobeying the rules. Of special interest is the *Ascoltatrice*, the sister responsible for monitoring conversations in the parlor and the grates, confession excluded. Often times, a special permission was required to engage in conversations, especially those with people other than immediate family members. It is unclear when permission could be obtained from the Abbess and when outside attention was required in the matter as both are mentioned as license granters.

6. No Sister may go to the grate without the *Ascoltatrice*, and these should not be elected according to the usual process, but they have to be deputies of the Abbess, and they have to be serious, prudent mothers who jealously guard the honor of the Monastery, and who have a spirit for reprimanding when they see or hear something bad has happened or has been said...

⁶³ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Secondo: Del numero dell Monache, e distinzione dell loro Classe, p.10.

1. ... la qual clausura e stata sempre intesa non tanto per le Serventi quanto per quelle da Coro.

9. The sisters should remember that it is forbidden to speak to [any] regulars, who do not have license from Rome, or from the Ordinary; this being not only declared by the Sacred Congregation, that they sin mortally by speaking to [outside] Sisters without the said license, but also in the Synod of the Florentine Diocese from the year 1645 it is forbidden to them under penalty of mortal sin, and those that speak to them will collude in their sin, thus we also forbid it expressly to the Sisters without the said license, which they are obligated not only to show, but also to leave in the hand of the Confessor or the Abbess.⁶⁴

The Abbess clearly held a role of immense power in the convent; she controlled licenses and permissions as well as punishments— in many instances, the Abbess was one of the few links to the outside world. This highest office holder played many roles; it was to her that all internal matters were relegated so it was imperative for Santo Stefano to establish guidelines concerning the persona of the abbess. Her family connections or the status of her lineage are not mentioned, perhaps because it was assumed that anyone who could profess at La Concezione already had the nobility and propriety that would have been sufficient to be the public face of the community.

The Abbess must work hard to have the qualities that Abbots must have, proportionately to her sex, and conforming to that [guideline] she has to remind herself that she occupies amongst the Sisters, the place of Christ; and in order for her to be for them as Mother, as Teacher and as Spiritual Advisor, for Christ showed himself thus towards his disciples, as a Mother for the love and Care with which she has to proceed with them in treating

⁶⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55.

6. Nessuna Mon[ac]a vada alla grata, senza l'Ascoltatrice, e queste non devo non eleggersi, a suo modo, ma devono esser deputate dalla M[adre] Bad[ess]a, e devono essere Madri gravi, prudenti, e gelose dell'onore del Mona[ster]o, e che abbino animo di ripredere quando vedessero, o sentissero cosa mal fatta o mal detta.

9. Ricordinsi le Mon[ach]e che il parlare a Regolari, che non anno licenza di Roma, o dal Ordianrio, e proibito, essendo non solamente [d]ichiarato dalla sacra Congregazione, che esse pecchino mortalmente parlando alle Mon[ach]e senza la detta licenza ma anco nel Sinodo digesano fiorentino dell'Anno mille secento quaranta cinque è vi[e]tato loro sotto pena di peccato mortale, e quelle che li parlano cooperanno al lor peccato, e pero ancor noi lo vietiamo espressamente alle Mon[ach]e senza la detta licenza, la quale sono obbligati non solo mostrala, ma anco lasciarla in mano del Padre Conf[esser]o o della M[adre] Bad[ess]a.

them and commanding them and providing for their spiritual and physical needs; as Teacher in admonishing and instructing through words, and with her own example of the Virtues and Religious Observances.⁶⁵

The sisters, in turn, were obligated to be obedient to the chosen Abbess: “[just as] children are obligated to be obedient, likewise these women are obligated to be obedient to the Abbess not only as the Mother of the family, but by reason of their vow, for as Professed Sisters they promised obedience to the Abbess.”⁶⁶

The election of Abbesses was of great interest not only to the local leaders and the community but also to the Council of Trent. Chapter VI of the twenty-fifth session mandated that elections for both male and female leaders were to be held by secret ballot and that any attempt to manipulate the votes or the outcome was strictly forbidden. The Council went further in Chapter VII to stipulate that the post of Abbess could only be held by a woman over forty who had lived a faithful life in the convent for at least eight years. In keeping with rules of clausura, male superiors could listen at the grate to hear the results of the election but they could not influence them. The Constitution also listed additional rules concerning the election of officials, including who may be elected, how

⁶⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda: Delle Cose spettanti alle Monache in particolare e ad altre Persone che seruono il Monast[er]o, Capiolo secondo: Delle Qualità Ufizio e Governo della Badessa, p.160.

Deve dunque la Bad[ess]a ingegnarsi d'avere le qualità che devono avere gli Abati proporzionatamente al suo sesso e conforme a quella deve ricordarsi che tiene tra le Mon[ach]e il luogo di Christo; e pero deve esser loro come Madre, come Maestra, e come Medico spirituale, che tale appunto si mostro Christo verso li suoi discepoli, come Madre per l'amore, e Carità con che deve procedere con esse nel trattare e nel comandare, e nel prov[ve]dere a lor bisogni spirituali e corporali; come Maestra nell' ammonire, e instruirle con le parole, e con l'esempio nelle Virtue e Osservanze Religiose.

⁶⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Terzo: della Autorità della Badessa, p.170.
...obbligano i figliuoli a obbedirli, poi ch' queste sono obbligate a obbedire alle Bad[ess]e non solo come Madre di famiglia, ma per ragion del voto, poi che nella Professione elle promettono obbedienza alla M[adre] Bad[ess]a.

long she may hold office, what their responsibilities included and so forth. Concerning the process of electing an Abbess, the Constitution is quite specific.

The election of the Abbesses, conforming with the Sacred Council of Trent, has to be done every three years, and following the said Council, the Sister to be elected must not be less than forty years old, except in cases mentioned by said Council in the 25th session in chapter 7, and she must have lived laudably at least eight years as a Professed sister; but following the Rule of Saint Benedict in Chapters 2 and 64, she has to be of such meritorious life that she be worthy of such Office; [the Rule] also declares which are the virtues and qualities that they render her worthy of it...Being that through Decree of Pope Gregory XV, in this election the Archbishop of Florence or his Vicar has to intervene; some days prior [to the election] the Abbess should let [the election] be known to him. When the designated day and hour has arrived, the Monsignor Archbishop or his Vicar with the Monsignor Prior of Santo Stefano of Pisa, or other Cavaliere Priest of said Religion in his stead should present themselves at the Grate of the Church; all of the Sisters that have a vote (voce) in the Chapter congregate in said room with the cocolle on their backs, and the Abbess kneeling at the foot of said grate will confess her sins of shortcomings committed during her Office; and the said Monsignor Prior, or his Commissioned Assistant in the religious habit, having assigned her the penitence, will absolve her of the Office and she, thus absolved of her sins, will kiss the ground and will pass through the little window near [the Gate], the keys of the Monastery, the Rule and Constitution, the Ring and Seal, and she will go to her place. The said Monsignor Prior will be able to say, if he wants, some encouraging word to the Sisters about a good Election, and after kneeling, the Prior will intone the hymn *Veni Creator* which the Sisters will continue responding in alternation. When this is finished, he will say the verse *Emitte Spiritum* and the Sisters will respond *Et Renouabis*; and standing he will say the prayer *Deus qui Corda*. When all this has been said/done, all of the Sisters will leave the room and the Abbess will remain alone, and she will be the first to name her candidate; and the others will follow in the order of seniority of Profession one at a time; some official selected by the Monsignor will assist in the role of Chancellor; when the naming of candidates is finished, all of the Sisters will return to said room, and the Monsignor Prior will declare the sister who had the most votes, and that one will be elected and confirmed as Abbess; and in case of a tie, they will put it to a secret vote and the one who will become Abbess who (has) the most votes, and if the vote remains equal it will be the option of the Monsignor Prior to elect the one of the two that he wishes; ...This being done, singing the hymn *Te Deum*

Laudamus, the Sisters will proceed to the Choir one after another; and during this all, even Novices and Servants shall go in pairs in order of Seniority to render Obedience to the elected Abbess; after which Ceremony, and having finished the aforementioned Hymn, the Monsignor Prior will say the verse *Confirma ho[c] Deus* after the Sisters respond *A templo sancto* he will say the prayer *Actiones nostra*.⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that the details of the process and the details the ceremony, (to the extent that the exact hymns and responses are dictated) are given paramount stature while the actual vote is more flexible. A verbal one-by-one vote is made and while it is technically “secret,” it is obviously controlled by the listening priest—no record could be definitively consulted. Only if this fails to produce a candidate, presumably by

⁶⁷ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Secondo, Capitolo Quatro: Della Elezzione della Madre Badessa, p.176.

L'Elezzione della Bad[ess]a conforme al Sacra Concilio di Trento deve farsi ogni tre Anni, e secondo il detto Concilio la Mon[ac]a da eleggersi, non deve esser inore di quaranta Anni compiti, eccetto ne casi che assegna detto Concilio nella sessione 25, al Capitolo 7 e che ella sia vissuta almeno otto Anni dopo la Professione lo devo l'mente; ma secondo la Regoladi Santo Benedetto al Capitolo 2 e 64 deve esser tale di merito di vita che sia degna di tale Ufizio; dove anco dichiara quali sieno quelle virtu e qualità che di ciò la rendono degna ... Essendo che per Decreto di Papa gregorio decimo quinto, deve a questa elezzione intervenire l'Arcivescovo di Firenze, o suo Vicario; qualche giorno avva nti la M[adre] Bad[ess]a glielo facci intendere; è giunto il giorno destinato, e l'ora che Mons[ignor] Arci[vescov]o o il suo Vic[ari]o con Mons[ignor] Priore di Santo Stefano di Pisa, o altro Sacerdote Cavaliere di detta Religione di sua Comissione assistino alla Grata di Chiesa; tutte le Mon[ach]e che anno voce in Capitolo si aduneranno in detta stanza con le Cocolle in dosso, e la Bad[ess]a inginocchiata a pie di detta grata dirà sua Colpa de mancamenti commessi nel suo Ufizio; e il detto Mons[ignor] Priore, o suo Commissario assistente in abito della Religione impostali la penitenza, l'assolverà dal'Ufizio, e ella così assoluta, baciato terra li porgerà per la finestrella quivi vicina, le Chiavi della Clausura la Reg[ol]a e Const[itution]i, l'Anello, e Sigillo, e andrà al suo luogo. Potrà il detto monsignor priore dire, se vuole, qualche parola esortatoria alle Mon[ach]e per la buona Elez[ion]e, e doppo inginocchiatosi intonerà l'Inno Veni Creator, quale dalle Mon[ach]e si proseguirà alternativamente, qual finito dirà il versetto, Emitte Spiritum, tuum, e le Mon[ach]e risponderanno et renovabis et egli stando in piedi dirà l'Orazione Deus qui Corda, detto questo tutte le Mon[ach]e usciranno della stanza e rimarrà la Bad[ess]a sola, la quale sarà la prima a nominare, e poi seguiranno l'altre per ordine di anzianità di Professione una per volta; In luogo di Cancelliere assisterà qual che Sacerdote a elezzione di Monsignor Priore; finita la nominazione tutte le Mon[ach]e suddette ritorneranno in detta stanza, e Monsignor Priore nominerà quella che a auto più voti, e quella sarà eletta e confermata per Bad[ess]a; e in caso di concorrenza di parità do voti, si mettino a partito per voti secreti, e quella rimanga Bad[ess]a che a più voti favoreuoli, e se il partito restassi uguale, sia in libertà di Mons[ignor] Priore ellegger delle due quale egli vuole; ... Fatto questo intuoni l'Inno Te Deum Laudamus, cantando, quale le Mon[ach]e proseguino a Coro alternativamente; e in quel mentre tutte etiam Novizie e Serventi vadino a Coppia per ordine di Ansianità a rendere Obbedienza alla Bad[ess]a eletta doppo la qual Cirimonia, e finito l'Inno suddetto Mons[ignor] Priore dirà il versetto Confirma ho[c] Deus e risposto dalle Mon[ach]e A templo sancto tuo dirà l'Orazione Actiones nostra.

simple majority, then an actual ballot is taken. For this secondary “voti segreti” the method of voting is unclear, was it to be by paper ballot or the customary white and black beans or by a show of hands? In addition, there is no indication that external authorities took an interest in how a woman came to be in a position to become Abbess. She is not, for example, required to have held any other office, nor were her family’s standing or political connections mentioned as a factor in her ascent to office. Presumably, reformers preferred that a woman’s virtuous example was the best prerequisite for the high office, but practically, it is likely that the process was far more political than the either set of documents lead the reader to believe.

Through a similarly political process, La Concezione conformed to the Council of Trent’s wishes for the safeguards against forced monachization. As Tarabotti argued, it is likely that many women were sent to live in convents against their wishes, often as part of the familial strategy for wealth and status, but also because having a female religious in the family was perceived as a necessary honor. Not coincidentally, as the cost of secular dowries rose throughout the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, monachization rates rose precipitously.⁶⁸ In its twenty-fifth session, the Council dedicated five chapters (XV- XIX) to ensuring that becoming a female religious was a strictly regulated process. La Concezione, staying faithful to its intention of being a ‘model institution,’ reinforces

⁶⁸ Richard C. Trexler, “Celibacy in the Renaissance: The Nuns of Florence,” in *The Women of Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1994), 6-30; Trevor Dean and Kate Lowe. *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Stanley Chojnacki, “Daughters and Oligarchs: Gender and the Early Renaissance State,” in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London: Longman, 1998), 63-86.

these chapters from Trent by including all of them in their Constitution and Charter, except one.

In Chapter XV, the Council mandates that a girl spend a year as a novice after she has taken the habit but before she takes her final vows, and that this may not be done until she has reached her sixteenth birthday.

1. It is forbidden by the Council of Trent that any Novice be admitted to Profession if she has not completed her sixteenth year, done a year of Probation as in Session 25 Chapter 15 under penalty of nullification of such Profession.

2. ... Conforming to Chapter 58 of the Rule, she will ask to be admitted to the Profession for the love of Jesus Christ after she will have been sent on behalf of the Abbess before the body of the Convent, and having won a majority of favorable votes, she will make a petition to the Monsignor Vicar for the Examination conforming to the Sacred Council of Trent, whereas in Chapter 17 and also in Chapter 16 the Council of Trent revokes all renunciations, and obligations made in the Novitiate without the license from the Archbishop or his Vicar before two months of the Profession.⁶⁹

After this year of probation, all novices submitted to an examination by an official to ensure that their forthcoming profession was indeed genuine, as required by the Council of Trent's Chapter XVI. This alone would seem to indicate that most girls entered the convent starting at the age of fifteen; however, they could enter as young as twelve years old according to Trent. Many in fact entered much younger, usually under

⁶⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Sesto: Del modo di Professare le Novizie Velate e Serventi, p.23.

1. E vietato dal Sacra Concilio di Trento che nessuna Novizia possa essere ammessa alla Professione della Religione se non à compiti i seidici Anni, e fatto un Anno di Probazione come nella sessione 25 al Cap: 15 sotto pena di nullita di tal Professione. 2. ... Conforme al Cap: 58 del la Regola chiederà d'essere ammessa alla Professione per Amore di Giusù Christo Doppo di che sarà mandata a partito dalla M[adre] Bad[ess]a in corpo di Convento, e essendo vinta dalla maggior parte de voti favorevoli, si farà la suplica a Monsignor Vic[ari]o per l'Esaminatore conforme al Sacra Concilio di Trento, dove sopra al Capitolo 17 dove anco nel Capitolo 16 annulla tutte le renunzie, e obblighi fatti dalle Novizie senza licenza dell'Arcivescovo o suo Vic[ari]o avva nti a due mesi della Professione.

the guise of *educande*, and then between twelve and fifteen began their formal novitiate followed by their profession at sixteen.⁷⁰ Trent's subsequent decree (Chapter XVII) states that a girl may take the habit at twelve but she must be examined then and again before she professes, at no younger than sixteen years old. The Constitution, as expected, upholds the age limit of twelve years old to enter as a *fanciulla*, or a young girl living under the care of the institution, presumably to become a nun when she came of age.⁷¹ The fourth pronouncement mandates that girls may not be forced into the religious life, hence the plethora of examinations.⁷² The Charter from Santo Stefano begins its first chapter with the regulations for accepting a young girl into La Concezione and includes each of these elements.

Girls are able to dress in the Monastic Habit every day and hour provided that they are twelve years old, conforming to the Sacred Council of Trent Session 25, Chapter 17... When the girl has been accepted according to the chapter by means of the free and secret vote of the majority of the Choir of

⁷⁰ Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues."

⁷¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Quatro: Dell'accettazione delle fanciulle tanto da Velarsi quanto per Serventi, p.14.

2. ... e quelle che richiede il Sacro concilio di Trento, cioè che abbino compito l'età di dodici Anni. This is affirmed in the Charter. ASPi 2878: Libro Primo, Sessione Prima, Del modo di dar l'Abito Religioso ad una Fanciulla sola, p.1-3.

Capitolo 1. De requisiti p[er] le Fanciulle, che devono ricever l'abito Monache: Si possono le Fanciulle vestir dell'Abito Monastico ogni giorno ed ora purché abbino finito gli dodici anni conforme alla disposizione del Sacro Concilio di Trento Sess[ione] 25. Capitolo 17.

⁷² An early example of an entrance recording an "exam:" ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 51, Libro Vestiari e Presiori 1592-1734, f.2r.

15 Settembre 1596: ... presono il Velo benedetto quattro n[ostr]e Mon[ach]e S[ant]a Maria Buontèri S[uor]a Ben[edet]ta Anselmi S[uor]a Caterina de Ricci da fermo S[uor]a Lucretia Malspina ... et presono labito et Croce de Cavall[ie]ri et forno p[ri]ma examine [per] ordine di Monsig[no]re Ant[oni]o Benicieni Vic[ari]o del Arciuesc[ov]o dal R[everen]do m[aest]re franc[esc]o Benvenuti can[ti]co di S[an]ta M[ari]a del fiore, Fal Velo servira loro tanto ch l'habbino l'età di anni 25; da havere il Velo sacratò ma in mentre, possono havere, la novice in Capitolo, attiva e passiva et in Coro esser Coriste ma il Testo del sacro [Concilio] mentre che si ritrova in Coro le 4 R[everen]de M[ad]re Consec[ra]te delle Murate lor Magg[io]re lo dichino loro; et quando d[et]te non possono [per] legittima scusa lo sossino dire le 4 velate o quelle che [per] legittima scusa lo possino dire le 4 velate o quelle che [per] i tempi si veleranò le sopra d[et]te 4 velate feciono, la profession il di 23 di Ottobre prossimo passato...

Sisters, she will not be able to take the vestments before, by the order of Ecclesiastical Superiors, she has been examined concerning her vocation, that is to say if she elects the religious life spontaneously, and not by force, subordination or threat; if she affirms her resolution to be obedient, and to observe the Rule of the Monastery, if she has been instructed well in the ministry of the Holy Faith, if she has been confirmed, if she has done the Exercises of Saint Ignazio, and any additional items that will seem appropriate to the prudent examiner; and she has to have authentic faith, that having finished her twelfth year, and all this has to be reported by the same examiner in a full written account in order to obtain from the Ecclesiastical Superiors license to wear the dress of the religious habit; when she has obtained this the Sisters will choose the day on which to do [perform] the said investiture.⁷³

Interestingly, in order to dress in the religious clothing, a girl must pass an interview consisting of requirements that were not made explicit by Trent— other than to ensure her earnest profession. This open-ended format perhaps meant that the “examination” could have been as simple as an introduction of the girl to an affiliate of the Order (perhaps even a family member would suffice) or it could have been a rigid series of pre-determined questions used by successive examiners.

In this passage, several new aspects are introduced. That the woman must have completed the exercises of Saint Ignazio is not part of the Tridentine or other contemporary reforms or the Benedictine Rule. This may have been at the bequest of

⁷³ ASPi 2878. Libro Primo, Sessione Prima: Del modo di dar l'Abito Religioso ad una Fanciulla sola. Capitolo 1. de requisiti [per] le Fanciulle, che devono ricever l'abito Monache, p.1-3. Si possono le Fanciulle vestir dell'Abito Monastico ogni giorno ed ora perchè abbino finito gli dodici anni conforme alla disposizione del Sacro Concilio di Trento Sessione 25. Capitolo 17. ...La Fanciulla adunque accettata che sarà capitolarmente [per] voti segreti e liberi dalla maggior parte della Monache non si potrà vestire se prima d'ordine dei Superiori Ecclesiastici non sarà stata esaminata un torno alla sua vocazione, cioè se si elegga la Rel[igion]e spontaneamente, e non [per] forza, subordinazione o minaccie; se abbia ferma risoluzione d'esser obbediente, e di osservare la Regola del Mona[ster]o, se sia bene istruita ne misteri della S[anta] Fede se sia Cresimata, se abbi fatto gli Esercizi di S[ant] Ignazio, e in quel di più che al prudnete esaminatore parrà più opportuno; e di più deve aver fede autentica, che abbi finiti gli dodici anni, e di tutto questo dal medesimo sig[no]ro esaminatore ne deve reportare in scritto piena relazione [per] ostenesse dal Superiore Eccle[siastic]o licenza di porer vestir l'abito religioso, la quale ottenuta possino di poi le Monache eleggere il giorno [per] fare detto vestimento.

Eleonora, or in honor of her as the foundress; it required that each girl be familiar with the spiritual meditations of Eleonora's friend and mentor Ignazio Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. Although a written account of the interview is not a step required by Trent, it is logical that this kind of documentation would have been instituted by the fastidious administration. Additionally, also mentioned in the previous passage, the sisters voted on an applicant's profession— not part of Tridentine reforms, the sisters actually seemed to have had input into the composition of their community.⁷⁴ Certainly, both free and secret ballots would have been an important part of the internal politics that probably consumed much of the inhabitants' time.

Chapter XIX from the Council of Trent, however, mandates that any complaints about forced or illegal monachization must be made within five years of the alleged forced profession. The mandate appears to have been written in response to the problem of desertion among male monastics who could physically leave the premise rather than addressing enclosed women, who were unlikely to leave because they had nowhere else to go. This chapter does not refer specifically to female religious but to "regulari" and considering the precautions mandated for women entering a convent, it may not have been intended to apply to women at all. However, Tarabotti mentions that the Council "promulgated an edict about women who did not give their spontaneous consent to be enclosed for life: it was said they could freely depart without any guilt or fault or shame whatsoever" which is not exactly what the decree says but it conveys the basic

⁷⁴ Regretfully, additional information on this tradition is not available. A girl had to be approved by both the Grand Duke, vetted by the Prior of Santo Stefano and accepted by the community as a whole (or at least by a majority).

meaning—that those forced into the habit did not have to stay.⁷⁵ Neither the Constitution nor the Charter mentions any reparation for forced enclosure and it seems unlikely that the rule would have been advertised, let alone enforced.

While convent documents include many pages of written statements attesting to the fact that examinations occurred, there is no indication of how many or what types of questions were asked, who was present, (did parents attend? Her confessor? The abbess?) where or under what circumstances the girl was questioned.⁷⁶ Beginning in 1613, the profession rite included an added layer of accountability—the entering girl, and one or both of her parents, signed an affidavit asserting her presence and acquiescence to convent life.⁷⁷ Like a secular marriage, the profession of a religious daughter was an intricate process of communications, bargaining, and networking amongst parties—the girl in question may or may not have had significant input.

⁷⁵ See footnote above, Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, Book 2, 119-20.

⁷⁶ The required exams were not consistently recorded until 1611, although the examinations (ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 51, Libro Vestiari e Presiori 1592-1734. 15 Settembre 1596) quoted in an above footnote is not an isolated event.

⁷⁷ For example: ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 51, Libro Vestiari e Presiori 1592-1734, Libro Tre: Ricordo come questo di 8 di Dicembre 1613, f.30r.

S[uor]a Caterina Eletta fig[li]a del Sig[nor] filippo del Migliore di età di anni 16 compiti il di 4 di ottobre prossimo passato, e già vestita, è stata Monaca Novizia sono quattro anni forniti il di 25 di detto mese, come si vede in questo f[oli]o 16 ha fatto la sua Professione in mano della Molto R[everen]da M[ad]re Abb[ades]sa S[uor] Umiliana Lenzi, presente tutto il Cap[ito]lo delle Monache conforme all'ordine, e con partecipazione di Monsig[no]re Conte Arturo d'Elci Priore della Chiesa de Caval[ie]ri di Santo Stefano in Pisa, essendo precedute le debite esaminat[zio]ne [per] Mons[igno]re Ill[ustrissi]mo Arcivescovo di fir[en]za dal Molto R[everen]do Sig[nor]e [G]iluio ficini Can[ti]co del Duomo sotto il di 9 di settembre passato; et in confermat[zio]ne e fede di ciò la medesima S[uor]a Cat[er]ina Eletta si sotto scrivera di prop[ri]a mano; furno testimoni di d[et]ta prof[essio]ne il M[aest]ro R[everen]do S[igno]re Gio[van]ni Panciatichi n[ost]ro Prete Confessor e Luca di Bast[ian]o n[ost]ro Chericò che tutto sia a Gloria di Dio, e salute dell'Anima sua [Io S[uor]a Caterina Eletta affermo come sopra di propria mano].

Of all the sacraments, confession and communion were of the highest priority to the reformers, especially as they were conducted for ordinaries. The Council of Trent decreed that both male and female religious were to take communion and confession regularly. The Council's Chapter X states that nuns were to have written into their constitutions that they would take communion and confession at least once a month and that their superiors must provide extra confessors to hear everyone two to three times a year; La Concezione's Constitution did this and then extended the requirements further.

Being that these Sacraments [Confession and Communion] require the disposition of the one who receive them, it does not seem good to us to force the Sisters to take them with more frequency than the Council of Trent admonishes them to do, that is to say, once a month... the Professed Sisters are to confess and take communion at least once a week... the usual place to hear the Confessions will be the little grate behind the main Altar, on whose little window, besides its iron grate and iron plate, there will always be securely fastened the frame of black oilcloth. When there is need, it will be possible to confess also at the grate of the Church at the door, but not without the cloth... Two times a year, the Confessor, with the consent of the Monsignor Prior of Santo Stefano in Pisa, should send them an extra Confessor, either secular priests, or a Regular, selecting always the best ones, and most exemplary Priests and Regulars of observant religious orders that are in the City; to these extraordinary [confessors] we want that all of the Sisters should present themselves, but we leave them free to choose whether to confess themselves or not.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo ottavo: Della frequenza de Sacramenti, della Confessione, e Comunione, p.117.

Essendo che a questi Sacramenti si richiede la disposizione di chi li riceve, non ci par bene forzare le Mon[ach]e a maggior frequenza di quello le ammonisce il Sacro Concilio Trento, cioè una volta il mese ... le Professe, a confessarsi, e comunicarsi almeno una volta la settimana, ... il luogo ordinario di udire le Confessioni sarà il gratino dreto all'Altare maggiore, alla cui finestrella, oltre alla sua ferrata, e piastra di ferro, sempre si terra fermo il telaio di tela nera incerata, potra anco quando bisogni confessare alla grata di Chiesa dalla porta, ma non senza tela ... Due volte l'anno il Padre Confessoro, di consenso di Monsignor priore di Santo Stefano di Pisa, mandi loro il Confessoro straordinario, quando Pre[t]i secoalri, e quando Regolari, scegliendo sempre de migliori, e più esemplari Sacerdoti e Religiosi di Religiori osservanti che sieno nella Cita a quali straordinari vogliamo che tutte le Mon[ach]e si rappresentino, ma bene lasciamo in loro libertà il confessarsi o no.

The essential qualities of taking both communion and confession regularly and that special confessors were to be provided occasionally, exist with the further stipulations that instead of taking confession and communion once a month, the Sisters of La Concezione should do so once a week (even though Trent advised once a month). Since the Order of Santo Stefano had a ready supply of such clerics, the additional duties would have been quite feasible. Additionally, although the Council of Trent decrees do not stipulate the privacy of both a grate and an opaque cloth, the Constitution is explicit in this manner requiring that a specific oilcloth be used both in the parlor and at the altar grates. Perhaps setting such stringent standards was another means by which Santo Stefano and the Medici publicly displayed an attitude of abundant devotion and supreme fidelity to the Pope and the spirit of reform.⁷⁹

The visitation of the monasteries was an imperative segment of the reform of the regulars— as the only formal opportunity to investigate whether or not the legislation was being enforced, it provided a forum for officials to break *clausura* and inspect the inner workings of an institution. However, neither the Tridentine legislation nor the convent documents state how often this should occur. A Prior of Santo Stefano, wanting to ensure that the visitation would be conducted justly, left instructions to ensure the propriety of the act.

The Most Illustrious and Reverend Monsignor Gaspero Cerati, Prior of the Church of the Sacred and Illustrious Religion of Santo Stefano Pope and Martyr, carefully considering, that because the office of Prior had been vacant for the space of seventeen years, it had been thirty years since [the

⁷⁹ Perhaps the public front of ‘above and beyond’ allowed the convent a measure of quiet luxury because they could be a model for other institutions in establishing (or revising) their constitutions.

Prior] had visited the church and enclosure of the Monastery of the Reverend Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin on via della Scala in this city of Florence, determined by his paternal zeal not only to make the visit to said church and enclosure but also before all other things to meet in private with each of the [nuns], following the style that all of the prelates practice.⁸⁰

The unusual vacancy of the office of Prior is not described elsewhere in the convent documents; perhaps no visitations were conducted during this time, certainly, there are no records of such an event and the records of the private interviews has not surfaced among the documents.

While this passage represents the issue of visitation from the perspective of Santo Stefano through the Charter, La Concezione's Constitution says relatively little about visitations. In the chapter concerning the responsibilities of the abbess, it is stated that *she* should regularly inspect the living quarters of the sisters and punish those with contraband; additionally there are many rules concerning maintaining clausura, but nothing that tells the sisters when or how official visitations should be conducted.⁸¹ In fact, the only reference to the requirement of the visit is in the opening chapter.

[We declare] That the said Monastery, Abbess and Sisters and its goods, earnings and worldly reasons and actions are exempt from the Jurisdiction

⁸⁰ ASPi 2878. Libro Terzo, Sessione terza, Capitolo 10. Visita del Monistero nuovo, p.402-04. L'ill[ustriss]imo e Rev[erendiss]imo Mons[ignor] Gaspero Cerati Priore della Conventuale della Sacra e Ill[ustriss]ima Religione di Santo Stefano Pape e Martire, maturamente considerando, che [per] essere stata vacante la dignità di Priore [per] lo spazio d'Anni 17 erano compiti 30 Anni che non era stata visitata la chiesa e clausura del Mona[ster]o delle r[erverendi] Madri dell'Immac[ulate] Con[cezion]e della Beatissima Verg[in]e osto in via della Scala di q[ue]sta Città di firenze, determino col suo pate[r]no zelo non solo di far la visita di detta chiesa e Clausura com' ancora prima d'ogni altra cosa d'ascoltar privatamente [ciasche d'una] delle m[onach]e si vocali come converse secondo lo stile che da tutti Prelati si pratica.

⁸¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capiolo secondo: Delle Qualità Ufizio e Governo della Badessa, p.160-70.

le Bad[ess]e visitino frequentemente il letti e Celle delle Mon[ach]e, e se vi trovano cosa alcuna che non sia stata loro concessa dalla Bad[ess]a punischino gravissimamente la Mon[ac]a che in ciò fusse trovata delinquente.

of the Archbishop of Florence and its Vicar, but rather [fall] under the Jurisdiction of the Serene Grand Duke of Tuscany, Grand Master of the Religion of the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano Pope and Martyr and spiritually under the Care, regimentation, jurisdiction, visitation and primacy of the Illustrious and Reverend Monsignor Prior of the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano; and that they are only subject to the Archbishop of Florence and its Vicar regarding Clausura, conforming to the orders of the Sacred Council of Trent. [We also declare] That the Sisters of the Choir shall dress in White with the Red Cross of the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano having made the Profession, conforming with the Sacred Council of Trent.⁸²

Interestingly, the end of this passage of the Constitution invokes the Council of Trent in a peculiar manner. In fact, the Council did not mention the dress or habit of monastics other than to say that ownership of secular belongings (including contemporary dresses) was not allowed. More significant however is the assertion that La Concezione was ordinarily beyond the Archbishop's purview. The visitation was to be conducted by the Prior of Santo Stefano, as were other spiritual and practical matters involving the women, rather than by the local ecclesiastical authorities. This is in conflict with the Council of Trent's Chapter IX stating that the bishop had providence over female institutions not under a house of regulars and Chapter XI in which both male and female house were subject to the jurisdiction and visitation of the local bishop. It appears from these incongruous pieces of evidence that while La Concezione wished to be a model

⁸² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Primo: Delli Obblighi, Efeuzioni, e Privilegi del Mona[ster]o secondo al sua Fondazione, p.5.

5. Che detto Mona[ster]o, Bad[ess]a, e Mon[ach]e e sua Beni rendite e ragioni e attioni temporali sieno Esenti dalla Jurisdizione dell'Arcivescovo di firenze e suo Vicario, ma sotto la Jur[isdizion]e del Ser[enissim]o Gran Duca di Toscana, Gran M[ae]str[o] della Religione de Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano Papa e Martire nello Spirituale sotto la cura, reggimento, Jur[isdizion]e, visita, e superiorita dell'Ill[ustrissim]o et Rev[erend]o Mons[ignor]e Priore de Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano; e Solamente sieno soggette all'Arci[vescov]o di Firenze e suo Vic[ari]o quanto alla Clausura, conforme a gli ordini del Sacro Concilio Tridentino. Che le Mon[ach]e da Coro vestino di Bianco con la Croce rossa da Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano e faccino la Professione conforme al sacro Concilio Tridentino.

institution of reform, the convent— and its leadership— held the institution exempted from such tenets, perhaps because as it could afford to do so both financially and politically.

Church fathers were certainly aware that bishops' power of enforcement would be hampered on all sides if not supported by the local governments. In the reform of the regulars, the "aid of the secular arm" is a phrase repeated because of the influence held by local leadership over city convents and monasteries— female institutions in particular. Since the details of many of the reforms were left to local control, in each prefecture, the diocesan bishops, the provincial rulers, and the superiors of the local Order had to come to an agreement for the implementation and enforcement of the regulations concerning the protection and supervision of the city's convents.

In Florence, Cosimo I used the already established bureaucratic entities, the *deputati* and *operai*, as monitors of his early governmental policies and as a sort of moral/political adjudicators; their service evolved to include supervising the implementation of Tridentine policies. In this capacity, some of these government agents were assigned to monitor convents and monasteries, particularly female ones, serving as intermediaries between the communities of women, their superiors, and authorities—both religious and secular. Despite their official mandates, they do not appear to have played a major operational role in the functioning of the convent. Although there are occasional references to "operai" (a term that could be used both for laborers and for ducal

administrators), at least some of whom were cavalieri, their exact responsibilities remain obscure.⁸³

In La Concezione, several secular and sacred authorities acted in overlapping official capacities as guardians, of not only the sisters, but also the reputation of the convent, the nobility of the Medici family, the honor of the court and the sanctity of papal authority. These layers of influence were both allied and contending forces at times, each originating from a deep-rooted interest in creating a convent that projected both Tridentine reform and elitist privilege. While regulatory control rested firmly with Santo Stefano as the primary custodians per the directive of their foundation, the Council of Trent stipulated that the Archbishop was to be charged with assuring the propriety of all the convents in his diocese, and the Grand Duke was charged with providing aid to the bishop, which he did in the form of *operai* and *deputati* appointed from the ranks of the Cavalieri.

The significance of the convent called La Concezione rests not only in its noble investiture but also in the spirit of reform, namely, the Medici's reading of the decrees of Trent and the image of reformed elitism created through public statements of compliance in the documents of the convent. The Charter, and more so the Constitution, written in the decades following the close of the final legislative session, echo much of the language of

⁸³ An example of such a monetary transaction: ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.133r. 21 July 1600, credito a Prete Paulo Blandini agente del S[igno]re Cav[alie]re Raffaello Medici n[ost]ro Operaio.

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 59, Lettere e Ordini, filza Lettere diverse, 1592-1692: Libro 8, Lettere d[e]l Sig[nor] Bracciò Valori, Operaio de trattano duessi affari d[e]l Monastero, Anno 1595-1613. The folder contains many letters, most concern commissions of artwork in the early years of the convent.

the decrees— an outward exhibition of the Medici court’s proactive application of reform. The Medici court could then point to ‘il monastero nuovo’ as proof that Florence was a leading city of papal fidelity and devotional fervor. Eleonora de Toledo, Cosimo I and Ferdinando I, aware of the impact the Council of Trent as part of a larger culture of reform would have on the future of Catholicism, carefully created the image of the convent to be a ‘model institution,’ the epitome of feminine devotion.

In some ways, La Concezione exemplified the austere decrees of the Council of Trent; they followed all of the rules that could be publicly observed— strict enclosure, age limits, examinations and restrictions on music in the chapel. In other ways, the author, certainly under the direction of the Medicean viewpoint, took the reforms to be malleable— only monophonic music was sung by the women themselves in the public chapel but the private space was another matter, rules concerning monastic poverty were ignored and property was privately owned. In contrast, the Constitution also stipulates rules that are not part of Trent— perhaps because they fit into the ongoing movement of reform, perhaps because the Medici wished to prove their ‘above and beyond’ dedication to the Catholic Church.

Three factors contribute to these apparent contradictions. First, the twenty-fourth session of the Council of Trent mandated that the legislation be applied by the local bishop so that it could conform to regional traditions and needs; this permitted Florence a degree of freedom in establishing a new convent that met the political and social ambitions of the court. Second, the decrees for the reform of the regulars required the “aid of the secular arm,” necessarily requiring the participation of the patrician families

who were employed in the Medici bureaucracy; part of their contribution consisted of forging rules and regulations that granted a certain amount of autonomy to the convent and its superiors from that very body. Third, in surpassing the *letter* of the legislative law, La Concezione created the perfect pretense for an institution that could circumvent the *spirit* of the law as long as the overall effect contributed to the appropriate public image.

La Concezione was founded, opened and operated within two sets of parallel interests, those of the spirit of reform and renewal, of which the Council of Trent was part, and those of the ennobled class of the Medici court. The Order of Santo Stefano created a regulatory structure for the convent that epitomized reform and devotional superiority while maintaining the patrician lifestyle desired by the elite daughters of the court. Interpreting Trent was a political act by the Medici court, but it was only one of many political connections between the court, the Order and La Concezione.

Chapter Two

The Political Alliance of La Concezione and the Order of Santo Stefano

On 4 October 1592, all of Florence experienced the civic and political displays of Medicean favor, military might, royal pageantry and pious devotion. The event was the ceremonial procession of Abbess Umiliana de Lenzi with Sisters Oretta Sapiti, Clemenzia d'Aro Spagnola, Laura Aldobrandini and Laudomina Malatesta as they left the renowned monastery of Le Murate to become the founding sisters of the “new monastery” of La Concezione established by Eleonora di Toledo de Medici for the most noble and affluent daughters of Florence. The convent was to enjoy the protection not only of the Medici court but also the royal knighthood, the *Ordine di Santo Stefano, Pape e Martire*. The festivities would have attracted many Florentines eager to see the *Gran Maestro* of Santo Stefano and Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando I, Grand Duchess Christina di Lorraine, princes, princesses, future Queens, bishops, and all manner of Florentine elites as the five pious women embarked on a procession traversing the city of Florence. An ostentatious celebration, it highlighted the Medici family’s rising sovereignty, political acumen and their prominent connection to the newly elected Pope Clement VIII.¹

The women of La Concezione were intricately tied firstly to the Medici court through the convent’s foundation and the continued support of the ducal family, secondly to the Order of Santo Stefano through ritual celebration and religious affiliation, and thirdly to the prominent families of Florence. The patrician class—members of the court and the Order—supported the convent through their patronage, social and kin relations, devotional activities, and most importantly, through the daughters they sent to populate La Concezione.

¹ The Constitution and the Charter each account for the events of the founding differently; this narrative represents my translation of a compilation of those statements, references found below.

This chapter will outline the significant role La Concezione played as an extension of the Medici court in the local, regional and international political arenas as part of a political triangle, that is, the court, the Order, and the convent. From its inception, La Concezione served both the political and social agenda of the upper echelons of Florentine (Medicean) society by catering to only the very finest of noble families and by creating an indelible and unique connection to the knighthood of Santo Stefano in Pisa. This was the aspiration of Eleonora di Toledo as she laid the cultural and financial groundwork for the ‘new convent’ through her 1562 testament.

Eleonora’s actions, as explicated in her testament, raise many questions about her motivations, though few answers are provided by the extant documents. Her motivation for creating a counterpart to a military knighthood of the Benedictine Order is curious because she appears to have had no previous connection to either military organizations or the Benedictine Rule. She does not indicate whether or not Cosimo played a role in her decision-making process, but it should be considered that Cosimo, and his political ambitions, were important to her and probably weighed on her mind. What was to be La Concezione’s unique contribution to Florence? Did she feel that there was something inadequate about the wealthy convents already established in Florence? Perhaps her inspiration was not about her earthly legacy so much as a last-minute effort to atone for her sins. What is clear is that Eleonora’s motives were highly complex and intertwined with those of the Medici court.

The issue of religious Rule is intriguing because Eleonora did not seem to have any special ties to the Benedictine Order before establishing an important convent of that

Rule, other than those to Santo Stefano through Cosimo. She was, however, known to have taken a special interest in Jesuit authorities. In fact, founder Ignatius of Loyola enlisted her aid in establishing a Jesuit mission in Florence. Chiara Franceschini remarks that Eleonora looked favorably upon individual Jesuits, including Diego Laínez, confessor to the Duchess and her daughters, but was less enthralled with the Society of Jesus as a whole.² By the end of her life, she had helped the Jesuits establish a school in Florence (to which she bequeathed an annuity of 200 scudi in her will) but had not changed her devotional practices to those of the Jesuit fathers who entreated her to do so. Perhaps her disillusionment with the Jesuits dissuaded her from further funding their projects.

Eleonora is often remembered for her extravagant couture, her love of fine food and drink and an insatiable gambling habit.³ As with many who could afford to do so, in her last statement on earth, she confessed to a priest and made generous charitable use of her property. In addition to the Jesuit cause, Eleonora gave small amounts as well as possessions to other convents and churches but these were mostly token gifts, common bequests among the aristocracy.⁴

² Chiara Franceschini, “*Los scholars son cosa de su excelentia, como lo es toda la Compañia*: Eleonora di Toledo and the Jesuits,” in *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchess of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 195.

³ Much of the documentary evidence of the latter of these comes from reprimanding letters, advice and guidelines communicated to Eleonora by Jesuit priest Juan do Polanco (1516-1577) who advised the duchess to avoid eight particular vices. One of which was the profligacy of gambling, apparently rampant in the ducal household and a conspicuous habit of the duchess. The Jesuit Order, *Polanci Complementa. Epistolae et commentaria Pl Joannis Alphonsi de Polanco e Societate Jesu; addenda caeteris ejusdem scriptis disper*, 2 vols. Monumenta historica Societatis Iesu (Madrid: Gabrielis Lopiz del Horno, 1916-17; 1969), 52-54.

⁴ ASF Possessioni, 4136, 4137, 4138. Listed under ‘elemosine.’

Such contributions and bequests certainly required thought and consideration, but a significant difference in magnitude is seen when comparing donations of clothing and small sums of money to the genesis of an entirely new endeavor. The creation of a convent is certainly not something an ailing Duchess -- grieving for two dead sons -- could have contemplated, organized and committed to legal status in the last few days of her life. Although I am not aware of any documentation to this effect, Eleonora and Cosimo had most likely discussed the political and personal ramifications of such collaboration, and the timelines for the establishment of the Order and La Concezione are not likely coincidental. Cosimo's petition for the Order of Santo Stefano to be recognized by the Papal authority was made in 1561 and it officially began its activities in 1562. That same year, Eleonora made a last minute testament establishing a convent to be governed by the newly formed civic and religious order, and in 1563, plans for its realization were under way. It appears that Cosimo carried through with Eleonora's wishes, at the same time ensuring a positive political impact for his own agenda.

History, in fact, has not recorded Eleonora as the sole founder of the convent—the Constitution and the Charter variously recognize Cosimo, as well as their sons and successive dukes, Francesco and Ferdinando, for their roles in establishing La Concezione. However, only Eleonora's name appears in every document that relays the events of the founding. Cosimo's name often appears alongside his consort's and in some documents (particularly those of Santo Stefano) his role is glorified. In cases such as the preface to the Constitution, the founders are listed as “the serene parents” of Ferdinando (the reigning Duke at the time the document was written) giving equal billing to Cosimo

and Eleonora as the historic founders while paying homage to Ferdinando as the reigning Grand Duke.⁵

The issue of Cosimo's involvement is exceptionally significant because it begs the question of his motivation. Did he wish to have a female institution built to round-out his political aspiration? Most likely, the Council of Trent encouraged his decision to create a devotional knighthood— it conveniently combined two of Cosimo's primary ambitions: ardent devotion and military might. In helping found La Concezione, did Cosimo wish to strengthen the devotional aspect of the knighthood or to create a feminine balance to the all male organization? Was the choice of a Florentine location for the convent (rather than a Pisan one) an attempt to enlarge the circumference of his court? Certainly, he could have established a female convent of his own volition, and since he chose not to do so, at least some of the impetus for the founding of La Concezione came from Eleonora.

The exact nature of Cosimo's involvement in the conceptualization and founding of the convent may be in question, but his dedication to its realization is not. The year after Eleonora's death, Cosimo set about plans for its construction; he engaged Vincenzo Borghini and Giorgio Vasari, his personal artistic advisors at court, to design the building and then officially founded 'il monastero nuovo.'⁶ By 1568, the construction had begun

⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Proemio. "...suoi Ser[enissi]mi Genitori fondato."

⁶ Margaret Daly Davis, *Giorgio Vasari: principi, letterati e artisti nelle carte di Giorgio Vasari, Casa Vasari, pittura vasariana dal 1532 al 1554, Sottociesa di S. Francesco: [catalogo delle mostre] Arezzo, 26 settembre-29 novembre 1981* (Firenze: Edam, 1981), see no. 72 for a letter from Bastiano Ambrogi di Venezia to Francesco de Medici, ASF MP 5107, f.305r-v, dated 29 Oct 1580, detailing Borghini's lesser known works as an architect; Ambrogi writes "Come nel fare il palcho della gran sala del palazzo di V[enerabile] A[ltez]za nel fare gli Archi trionfali con le loro historie per la venuta della gran Duchessa,

and Tommaso de' Medici, as the duke's administrator, reported to Borghini that the materials requested by the Duke had been moved to the site of the convent.⁷ In his memoirs, Agostino Lapini of Cosimo's court commented that Cosimo had some of the white marble columns from the choir of the Duomo moved to La Concezione as building materials.⁸

Janet Cox-Rearick notes that of the several works of art known to have belonged to La Concezione, two represented the Immaculate Conception; undoubtedly, this was related to the fact that the convent was dedicated to the holy event. Cosimo commissioned the first of the two from the famous Medici portraitist Agnolo Bronzino; it was an altarpiece depicting Mary at the moment of the Immaculate Conception and was never completed, due at least in part to the artist's death in 1574.⁹ This commission does

santa M[ari]a. Nel fare l'apparato in S[an] Giovanni, per il battesimo della primogenita di V[enerabile] A[ltez]za, et in ultimo, nel dare il suo disegno del Monasterio che si fabbrica per testamento fatto dalla fel.ma m.a della gran Duchessa sua madre, feci grand.ma fatica. La quale mi pareva suavissima redundando in servizio della gloriosa m.a del grand Duca Cosimo suo padre, il quale più volte mi parlò et massimamente, al suddetto Monasterio, dove quasi ogni mattina S[ua] A[ltez]za venia con duo staffieri, solamente per veder quello che si lavorava, alla cui ser.ta infinite volte portai la cischeranna da sedere, parlando di poi S[ignor] Ser.ta molto familiarmente con il sudetto priore." Vasari was well versed in Counter-Reformation architecture by this time because he had restructured certain elements of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce for Duke Cosimo between the 1560s and 1580s. See Blake McDowell Wilson, *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1992), 229-30.

⁷ ASF MP 221, f.44r (copy of a letter to Borghini 6 June 1658): Come dal Duca mio S[igno]re nostro mi è stato comandato con ordine che io cons[egno] tutto a Vostra Signoria per cominciare a condurre material alla nuova fabrica del monasterio.

⁸ Agostino Lapini, *Diario Fiorentino di Agostino Lapini dal 252 al 1596* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1900), 164.

À di 14 di giugno 1569 si messono le prime colonne di marmo mistio, cioè rosse e bianche, e d'altri varj colori, intorno al bel coro di marmo bianc di S[anta] Maria del Fiore, e si levorno certe colonne di marmo bianco incannellate, che vi erano state qualche anno, e si portorno al nuovo Monistero nella Via della Scala, accanto a S[anta] Maria Novella, di dietro a dove era già la sala del Papa, per commissione del duca Cosimo suddetto.

⁹ Janet Cox-Rearick, "La Ill[ustrissi]ma Sig[nor]a Duchessa felice memoria: The Posthumous Eleonora di Toledo," in *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchess of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 225-65. She likens it to other enormous altarpieces

not appear to reflect Cosimo and the convent's connection to the Order of Santo Stefano, but rather Eleonora's positive reception of the Immaculate Conception as an important part of Spanish devotion.¹⁰

In the first decade of the project, Cosimo appears to have made great strides in ensuring that the last wishes of his wife would be fulfilled in a manner befitting her memory—he hired his own personal designers, builders and artists; he used the finest materials; and when the cornerstone for the convent was laid in 1568, Cosimo and then Eleonora by her testament were the dedicatees.¹¹ After Cosimo's death in 1574, the Medici family continued to pursue the construction and mandate of the convent according to Eleonora's wishes although perhaps not with the pace that Cosimo had set, since it would be another twenty years before the first women inhabited it.

completed by Bronzino in the mid-sixteenth century, but with “motifs specific to his latest works.” Cox-Rearick also notes that it may have been modeled on an altarpiece of the same theme by Vasari from 1541. It is currently housed in S[anta] Maria Regina della Pace in poor condition, 237.

¹⁰ Mary has long been the patroness of Spain and the Immaculate Conception was a popular devotional focus from the Middle Ages on. The sixteenth century was particularly noted for the increased attention the subject received in art. See Howard Hibbard, “Guido Renis Painting of the Immaculate Conception,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 28/1 (Summer, 1969):18-32. (p.24-5 discuss Vasari's 1540 Immaculate Conception). Eleonora's Spanish-influenced devotion is discussed in Robert W. Gaston, “Eleonora di Toledo's Chapel: Lineage, Salvation and the War Against the Turks,” in *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchess of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

¹¹ Lapini, *Diario Fiorentino*, 160.

À di 27 detto luglio (1568), a ore 11 _ in circa, in martedì, si messe la prima pietra e si cominciò a murare il fondamento del nuovo monastero nella Via della Scala, accanto al convento di S[anta] Maria Novella, et a dove già era, e si chiamava la Sala del Papa; e la benedisse e ve la piantò e messe l'arcivescovo di Firenze messer Antonio Altoviti. E messa che ve l'ebbe, il Capitolo tutto di S[an] Lorenzo vi cantò una Messa del Spirito Santo. E le parole che erono e sono scritte in su al pietra che nel primo fondamento si messe, che fu di marmo, dicono così: *Ill.mus Cosmus Florentiae et Senarum Dux Il fecit ex testamento Eleonoris (sic) Toledae Uxor et sua pietate*. Ed in sul detto quadrotto di marmo, a dove sono scritte le suddette parole, vi si messe e pose sopra certe medaglie d'argento e di bronzo, com l'impronta del detto duca osimo de' Medici, e do sopra alle dette medaglie e parole, vi si gettò su molto carbone pesto, per la conservatione delle parole; che codice conserva detto carbone uan infinità d'anni; e di poi si messe sopra la polvere di detto carbone una pietra, e così si starà forse in eterno. E subito vi si gettò sopra una quantità grande di calcina e jaja mescolta insieme; et io fui presente e viddi il tutto che qui è scritto. Fello principiare il detto duca, e per ancora non se gli è posto nome nessuno.

A number of additional works of art are known to have been commissioned for La Concezione, although the vast majority of works eventually commissioned have probably since been lost. Above the altar was a second depiction of the Immaculate Conception, this one by Antonio Franchi featuring Saint Stephen as the patron saint of the Order, Saint Benedict as the father of the Benedictine Rule, and Saint Michael, the warrior of the angels—the image probably spoke to Cosimo’s military ambitions.¹² Although I have not found any specific link between the saint and the convent, he was frequently invoked at the beginning of convent documents indicating that he held some special significance for La Concezione, and the artistic commission confirms this.¹³ A statue of Eleonora was commissioned in 1592; it was placed behind the high altar and inscribed “Eleonora di Toledo Medici, Fondatrice.”¹⁴ Although it is now lost, the original statute may have been replicated about 1600 as a commemorative bust.¹⁵ The church itself was not consecrated until 1607 when it was officially dedicated to the Immaculate Conception by Bishop Alessandro Marzi Medici. By this time, Eleonora’s second ducal son, Ferdinando, was the reigning Medici.

¹² The early Christians thought of the Archangel Michael as protector of the sick; only in later centuries was Michael called the warrior of the angels, often represented in art with a sword and shield. Perhaps the Medici appropriated both his early image as a *medico* and for his later militaristic image.

¹³ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale 1592-1605, preface.

Al' nome della S[antissim]a trinita p[ad]rè Figliuolo et spirito. S[an]to et della Gloriosa Verg[i]ne Madre advocata n[ost]ra Et di S[an]to Michele Arca[n]g[e]lo, et di S[an]to Bened[et]o n[ost]rò S[erenissi]mo p[ad]re et di S[an]to Stefano papa et martire, n[ost]ro [pro]tettore et di t[ut]ta la Corete [sic] Celeste.

¹⁴ “ELEONORA TOLETANA MEDICES FVNDATRIX.” Vincenzio Follini and Modesto Rastrelli. *Firenze antica e moderna* (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1970), 7:93-94. Also noted by Richa *Notizie istoriche*, 3:113. According to Cox-Rearick, there is a set of relevant drawings from 1823 by Giuseppe Martelli, Florence, Uffizi 6137A-6145A.

¹⁵ Cox-Rearick, “*La Ill[ustriss]ima Sig[nor]a*,” 235, picture; figure 10.3.

Both the Constitution and the Charter include in their introductions comments on the founding of the convent. There are common elements to these versions—each was probably written about the time the convent was opened, so they acted as a memorial tribute; both gave credit to Eleonora and her last testament for the foundation; each one mentioned the financial arrangements; and they both recognized Cosimo and the Order of Santo Stefano as providing the logistical and spiritual basis for the convent. However, the slant of each reflects the position of the document: the “internal” (female) and “external” (male) perspectives. The Charter (written from the vantage of Santo Stefano) only mentions Eleonora’s role as the individual who ordered and arranged for the convent’s physical existence; it mentions the dowry and then notes Eleonora’s sons as caretakers of the convent.¹⁶ The Constitution, on the other hand, remarks on Eleonora as a just and worthy consort and makes clear her relationship with the Virgin Mary as the inspiration for the convent’s existence, noting its location and spaciousness; also, details of an installment plan are listed but the document does not specifically list how dowries were used as funding.¹⁷ In evoking Eleonora’s proclivity towards extraordinary piety and

¹⁶ ASPi 2878, Proemio.

Prima di descrivere i Riti, e Ceremonie ecclesiastiche solite usarsi dal Prelate dell'Ordine militare di S[anto] Stefano Papa e Martire nella chiesa d[e]lle Rev[erend]e Monache della santissima Concezione in Firenze lo stimato bene sendere inteso il lettore da di fusse fondato il di loro Monastero, con che rendita, e con quale istituto Sappiasi adunque come Donna Eleonora di Toledo Gran Duchessa di Toscana aveva ordinato, e comandato, che si ergesse, e istituisse un Monastero in questa nostra Città di Firenze sotto il Titolo, e invocazione della Concezione della Santissima vergine Maria sotto l'ordine di Santo Stefano Papa e Martire; e avendo il Serenis[sim]o Gran Duca Cosimo primo suo consorte, non solo procurato, che ciò fusse inseguito, ma ancora col suo propio denaro aggiunto entrate tali, che costituivano una Dote a detto Mona[ster]o di scudi 1800 e più ogn' Anno en avendo per funzionare questo Opera stante il passaggio suo all'altra vita, il Serenis[im]o Figliuolo Franc[esc]o proseguì quest'opera consone alla volontà de suoi genitori, ma con tutto ciò non pot[er]e finirla, l'altro Serenissimo Figliuolo chiamato ferdinando Cardinale Gran Duca terzo di Toscana e Gran Maestro [per] fezionò questo Opera, essendo notate queste parole.

¹⁷ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Tavo Istorico.

linking the reason for her actions to the Virgin, the Constitution clearly claims female (both earthly and divine) agency for the existence and maintenance of the institution, a departure from the Medici/Santo Stefano invocation.

At the time of the completion and opening of the convent in 1592, both Cosimo I and Eleonora had died; however, the Charter for Santo Stefano explicitly determined that the reigning Medici grand duke would have oversight over La Concezione. Hence, the couple's son Ferdinando I and his consort Christina of Lorraine were the ceremonial figureheads for the consecration festivities.¹⁸ The documents do not explicitly state their actions at the event; however, it is fair to expect that Ferdinando's role was civically oriented in his capacity as Grand Duke and Gran Maestro, whereas Cristina's role concerned displays of female piety rather than affairs of state.

La Serenissima Principessa Donna Elenora di Toledo Spagnola, già Granduchessa di Toscana, nutri sempre una specialissima devozione verso, Maria Santissima, sotto il titolo dell'Immacolata Concezione, avendola eletta [per] sua speciale Avvocata, degni frutti della non ordinaria pietà, e illibatezza di Costumi che possedevansi, da questa bene amata, ed illustre Principessa, e Sovrana.

Ella volle imitare le virtù del proprio Reale Consorte il Gran Duca Cosimo, quale aveva già fondato l'ordine Insigne dei Cavalieri di S[ant]o Stefano Papa, e martire, onde pensò, ove ed in qual Luogo potesse Ella pure erigere un tale ordine [per] le Femmine, e piacquele un Spazioso Recinto, che restava in via della scala.

Dopo lo più brevi ma [mature] riflessioni, questo appunto elesse, ed ordinò, che di subito si desse mano alla Fabbrica; Si compiacque in seguito, dotarlo di [esceteranti] Rendite, che stabili sul monte di Firenze da ritirarsi dalle novelle Cavalieresse in tre annue rate in perpetuo, cioè ogni quadimestre la rata, e che a capo dell'Anno affrettando a Quell'universo tributo, che ogni vivente render deve, senza speranza di potersi a quello sottrarre, tolse a noi miseri mortali sì ammirabile sovrana, così è che non potè vedere terminata la Fabbrica ne compì i suoi voti, ed in tale stato pure resto fino che visse il di Lei R[eale] Consorte, il Granduca Cosimo.”

¹⁸ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Tavo Istorico.

Successe a questi Ferdinando figliuolo delle Altezze Loro, e non solo terminò la fabbrica, secondo quello ideato aveva la generosa Istitutrice...

ASPi 2878, Proemio.

Per render più memorabile questa funzione la Gran D[uche]ssa Cristina di Lorena, e la Principessa Maria, che poi salì al sono di Francia accompagnate da Donna Fran[cese] Orsini de' Conti di Pitigliano...”

After the initial activities of founding a convent, the Medici family continued to be participate in decisions and the operation of the convent. This was in part because the daughters of La Concezione were from families who were active at court and in the Order, making Medici involvement even more important. In specifying the status of La Concezione, Eleonora was not creating just another convent among the panoply of such places in Florence—she was creating a haven for women deemed the most worthy of both the noble life and religious elevation. As the institution was specifically for noble women of the highest caliber, the primary prerequisite for acceptance into La Concezione was the presence of a *Cavaliere* in the family.¹⁹ Documents in the archives of Santo Stefano include a book of requests for admittance complete with many pages of family histories, letters of recommendation attesting to the applicant's pious and honorable person, and even formal coats-of-arms painted on silk proving that the girl in question had reputable, and noble, quarters.²⁰ These silk quarters are particularly interesting because of their Spanish origins.²¹

The final decision to accept a girl as a novice sister rested with the Grand Master of the Order, so in effect, the Grand Duke of Tuscany handpicked the girls and the

¹⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Primo Capitolo Primo: Delli Obblighi, Efeuzioni, e Privilegi del Mona[ster]o secondo al sua Fondazione, p.5-10.

9. Che le fanciulle d'accettarsi sieno nate da principio di legittimo matrimonio, e quelle da Coro sieno nobili da canto di Padre, e di Madre di Auoli, e Bisauoli, come gli huomini che vogliono ricevere la Croce de Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano, e fare el medesime Provanze ma circa a questo il sommo Pontefice concede a Monsig[nor] Priore de Cav[alier]i facultà di dispensare, e alle Mon[ach]e di accettare tali dispensate di nobiltà, ma l'uso è sempre stato che di ciò dispensi il Gran Maestro, e cosi si osservi in avvenire Che tanto le da uelarsi quanto le Serventi non sieno obbligate a dare al Mona[ster]o altro che il vestuario.

²⁰ ASPi 566-568, "Provanze di Nobilit." "

²¹ My thanks to Edward Goldberg for pointing out the significance of quarters painted silk.

families that made up the La Concezione community.²² This ensured not only that the daughters came from the highest ranks in society, but also that the community was built with specific families at the center, families that were important at court and within the Order.

The Medici family continued their role as magistrates and benefactors throughout the two hundred years of the convent's existence. The sisters' responsibilities in response included prayers for the protection and health of the Medici family and the Duchy, and they were employed in remembering their patroness with daily evening prayers.²³ This is significant not only because it ensured her permanent place of honor, but because every evening, her name was placed next to God and the Virgin Mary. This high praise would have been important not only to the sisters and their families, but to the Medici dukes as subsequent figureheads of La Concezione who revered their mother—both Francesco and Ferdinando named their first daughters “Eleonora” indicating that remembering her was an important part of Medicean culture.²⁴ In addition to the nuns' daily prayers, there were annual celebrations on the anniversaries of the deaths of Eleonora, Cosimo, and later, Francesco and Ferdinando.²⁵ The Constitution specifically notes that the masses for

²² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Tavo Istorico.

Non si possono vestivo Novizzie, senza la Licenza di S[ua] A[ltezza] R[eale] come Gran Maestro dell'Ordine suddetto.

²³ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo secondo: Dell'Ordine del'Refettorio mattina, e sera, p.86.

²⁴ Pompeo Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane*, tomo 15: Francesco's daughter, Eleonora (1566-1611) married Vincenzo I Gonzaga; Ferdinando's daughter Eleonora (1591-1617) is not known to have married.

²⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Primo, p.5-10.

11. ... obbligate a celebrare ogni anno un Anniversario per l'Anima della Du[che]ssa Elen.a ... e Cosimo, e Francesco, e Ferdinando.

Eleonora and Ferdinando were to be sung.²⁶ Another mass celebrated annually was on 2 August, the feast day of Saint Stephen, the third century pope, martyr and patron of the convent's "brother" Order. This feast in particular was celebrated by the convent and the Order jointly; the financial records of La Concezione indicate that money was designated for special services and singers from Santo Stefano were hired for a sung mass.²⁷

The above examples illustrate the many ways in which the Medici family had a vested interest in the affairs of La Concezione. Eleonora's precise motivations may remain unknown, but the effect of her testament and the effort put forth by her family clearly indicate that she intended for La Concezione to serve as a part of the Medici-family entourage of political assets; Cosimo, and later Francesco and Ferdinando, were obligated by tradition and affection for Eleonora to establish the convent with the standards and care that Eleonora herself wanted for the *gentildonne*. The construction and adornments ensured the highest standards of patrician surroundings (fit for a Medici princess and her retinue) and the admittance process itself demonstrated some of the ways in which the Medici family continued to exercise influence throughout the life of the convent.

²⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo terzo, p.109-11.

Quali Messe, e quali Ufizi devono cantarsi dalle Monache, canterano le messe per l'Anniversario per la Duch[ess]a Eleonora di Toledo e quello del Gran Duca Ferdinando I.

²⁷ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Tavo Istorico.

Le Reali Altezze Serenissime ogni anno [per] il di due di Agosto in cui ricorreva La festa di Santo Stefano Pape e Martire, si portavano in Persona con i Cavalieri di detto Ordine ad udire la S[-]r messa in detta Chiesa, facendo la Funzione, ed il Pontificale, il Gran Priore della Chiesa dei Cavaliere di Pisa, che in detta epoca si portava in Firenze.

ASF CRS 134, the Libri Giornali contain entries for almost every year (with the exception of the missing book for years 1604-1637).

The Political Affiliation of Santo Stefano and La Concezione

The interconnections between La Concezione, the Medici family and the Order of Santo Stefano form a fascinating triangle: the family founded and was the effective head of the two institutions; individual Medici (including ducal sons and daughters) were members of each; the institutions were socially, economically and politically aligned; and humanistic forces such as education and the arts were shared among them. These political ties can be divided into three categories: the ritualistic, the practical and the cultural.

In terms of ritualistic obligations, the Charter indicates that Santo Stefano's long-term commitment to the spiritual well-being of the sisters was extensive; in fact, the Order provided for all of the convent's spiritual guidance—I have found no trace of influence from any of the Benedictine churches or monasteries, and the ecclesiastical authorities seem to have left the regulation of La Concezione in the hands of the Order. According to the Charter, the prior and monsignor of the Order's conventual church performed the vow-taking rituals such as the vestiture and profession, and were responsible for the more common ones of Mass and confession. In short, the *cavalieri* served as the mediators between the sisters and God, as well as between the sisters and the community at large.²⁸ This relationship was significant because the salvation of the sisters and their ability to act as intercessors between their families and heaven depended on the strength of their spirituality. Almost all of the hagiographies rely on the confessor/penitent relationship to establish the legitimacy of the saint, and while I have found no account of miracles or a saint at La Concezione, confession remained one of the

²⁸ ASPi 2878.

most powerful forces in the spiritual life of any early modern Catholic.²⁹ That the role of confessor was filled by *cavalieri* means that the *political* and the *spiritual* were inherently intertwined.

Of the different administrative roles appended to a female religious, the highest title was that of *baddessa* or *abbadessa*, which represented the pinnacle of a nun's life; in La Concezione, this was a three-year term of office. The sisters themselves chose one of their own to facilitate the daily operations, oversee the accounting books and maintain the dignity expected of the city's most elite convent. The induction of a new abbess was one of the most significant political and public rituals in the life of a convent. While the office was determined by a vote within the walls, its impact was felt throughout the city; it was an occasion to glorify not only the elected woman, but also her family, the Order, the convent, and local authorities. Similar elaborate ceremonies steeped in religious and civic symbolism were enacted in cities throughout Italy. The abbess was already a 'bride of Christ' and in becoming the leader of her community, she took on a role as a part of the symbolic narrative of the city.

In Venice, an abbess was "married" to the doge in a ceremony parallel to the ritual that annually represented Venice's relationship to the sea.³⁰ Mary Laven writes that in the Serene city, the doge was symbolically married to the sea each year in a twelfth-century ritual called the *Sensa*, "in recognition of the republic's dominion" over the sea.

²⁹ For an example of the relationship between confessor and female religious, see E. Ann. Matter, "The Personal and the Paradigm: The Book of Maria Domitilla Galluzzi," in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

³⁰ Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent* (London: Viking Press, 2002), 78-80.

In a ceremony that mirrored this ritual, the abbess of the convent *Santa Maria delle Vergini* “married” the Doge during her investiture as part of a thirteenth-century ritual underlining his rights of patronage. “Placing the precious ring of Saint Mark upon her finger, the doge “married” the newly elected abbess ‘in recognition of his ancient preeminence.’”³¹ This ceremony included a Latin oration by a fellow nun, and a wedding banquet for noble dignitaries. Laven comments that the ceremony placed the doge and the abbess on near equal footing: as the doge protected and guided the city, the abbess did as much for her community and returned to the doge an affirmation of his rule with the potent blessings of the convent.

At La Concezione, the abbess established a relationship, a symbolic representation of a “marriage,” with the Monsignor of Santo Stefano (in the place of Christ) through the induction ceremony. During the course of which she promised to observe the Rule and the Constitution as given to her by the Monsignor. He in turn, gave to her the keys to the gate, the official seal and a ring further symbolizing their “union.”³²

³¹ Laven quotes Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 127; Francesco Sansovino (1581) remarks on the wedding ritual.

³² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Primo, p.5-10.

12. Che la Superiora per i tempi futura, doppo l'assunzione al Badessato prometta nelle mani di Monsig[no]re o suo sostituto l'osserva n[ost]ra di queste cose, il che per l'avvenire non occorerà ma basterà la promessa solita dell'osserva n[ost]ra della Regola, e Constituzioni, mentre che in esse Constituzioni sono inserite come qui aviamo fatto.

Parte Secondo, Capitolo Quatro, Della Elezzione della Madre Badessa, p.176-81.

Essendo che per Decreto di Papa gregorio decimo quinto, deve a questa elezzione intervenire l'Arcivescovo di Firenze, o suo Vicario; qualche giorno avanti la M[adre] Bad[ess]a glielo facci intendere; e giunto il giorno destinato, e l'ora che Mons[ignor]Arci[vescov]o o il suo Vic[ari]o con Mons[ignor] Priore di Santo Stefano di Pisa, o altro Sacerdote Cavaliere di detta Religione di sua Comissione assistino alla Grata di Chiesa; tutte le Mon[ach]e che anno voce in Capitolo si aduneranno in detta stanza con le Cocolle in dosso, e la Bad[ess]a inginocchiata a pie di detta grata dirà sua Colpa de mancamenti commessi nel suo Ufizio; e il detto Mons[ignor] Priore, o suo Commissario assistente in abito della Religione impostali la penitenza,

In similarly symbolic language of power and authority, the Constitution discusses the role of the father confessor and the Order towards the convent in symbolic, nautical terms:

And because the Spiritual Father in the Ship of the Religion is like the Pilot who directs how to straighten out the Ship in order to escape [avoid] the shoals and lead it to the Port, and the abbess is like the one who steers whose task it is to direct the rudder according to how the Pilot directs; to whom [the abbess] the other office-holders as ministers have to obey in order to lead to salvation; we will thus begin with [the role of] the Spiritual Father and then we will go on about the office of the Abbess, and successively about the other offices degree by degree. It was thus so close to [the] Heart of the Serene founders of this monastery the thought that the Spiritual Father had to uphold and guide this Monastery on the path of religious observance, that they had a house built for his dwelling next to [the monastery], so that he would always be ready for their spiritual needs.³³

This nautical language is not surprising given the importance of Pisa as a port city and the *cavalieri* as the military protectors of that city. I have found no indication that La Concezione had any connection either to the port or to maritime artifacts, which makes

l'assoluerà dal'Ufizio, e ella così assoluta, baciato terra li porgerà per la finestrella quivi vicina, le Chiavi della Clausura la Reg[ol]a e Const[itution]i, l'Anello, e Sigillo, e andrà al suo luogo.

ASPi 2878. Libro Secondo, Sessione quarta, 1. Dell'elezione dlla Badessa, p.222-25.

³³ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Primo: Del Padre Spirituale e Confessore del Monast[er]o e Messe, p.156-60.

E per che il P[adre] Spir[tual]e nella Nave della Religione e a giusa del Piloto che insegna addirizzare la Nave per fuggire li scogli e condurla al Porto, e la baedessa e a guisa del Nocchiero a cui tocca a dirizzare il timone di quella conforme che li dice il Piloto a cui l'altre Ufiziali come ministre devono ubbidire per condurla a saluamento [ci faremo] dal Padre Spi[tual]e e poi seguiteremo dell'Ufi[zi]o della Bad[ess]a, e successiuamente dell'altre ufiziali di grado in grado, fu così a Cuore a Ser[imiss]i fondatori di questo Mona[ster]o il pensiero del Padre Spirituale che doverva reggere e guidare questo Mona[ster]o nella via della Osserva n[ost]ra religiosa che insieme col Mona[ster]o fecero fabbricare la Casa per uso della sua Abitazione accanto a quello, acciò fusse sempre pronto a lor bisogni Spirituali, e nell'ultimo de Capitoli vecchi fu destinata per lui e assegnatoli Cento Scudi l'Anno di Provisione, obbligandolo con detta Provisione a dire ogni giorno di riposo la settimana e a amministrar loro i Santissimi Sacr[amen]ti in vita e in Morte secondo le Constituzioni del Mona[ster]o, Cantar le Messe, e far l'altre funzioni che se li appartengono.

this reference, in the Constitution no less, even more interesting.³⁴ The abbess, acting on behalf of the *cavalieri*, was part of the chain of command: the sisters obeyed the officers who obeyed the abbess; the abbess was guided by the Order who in turn (theoretically) acted on behalf of God. The language may also be in reference to Biblical passages. There are several accounts in both the Old and New Testaments that tell of ships in storms and God aiding fishermen and sailors on rough seas; no story exactly matches the language in the passage, so it may be a combination of stories from Noah, Jonah, Acts, James and the Gospels. As the military and religious roles of Santo Stefano were intertwined, it is logical that the two spilled into their ritualistic obligations, at both the conventual church and the convent.

In addition to the highly specific nature of rituals and the role that the Order played in guiding the spirituality of the convent, the officials of the Order that served the convent also played a role in matters more practical in nature. The housing next to the convent for the priest and his allotment of one hundred scudi per year would have aided the sisters in functioning as part of the city. Other ways that the Order managed the practical concerns of the convent included maintaining the financial obligations of operating a convent which had little contact with vendors or the municipal government; the convent therefore needed a mediator for legal matters and those involving the banking system (lest we forget that the Medici were bankers before they were despots). The convent received annual allowances of grain, salt and an annual stipend of more than

³⁴ The image of God guiding a ship was a common metaphor, even in secular contexts.

eighteen hundred scudi, a hefty budget.³⁵ Eighteen hundred scudi was also the standard dowry amount for a girl who would become a *professa*. This was relatively low dowry for a wealthy convent in a major city.³⁶ However, because of the other requirements for acceptance into La Concezione, namely the *cavaliere* relation, the dowry seems to have been a formality. The Order was in charge of collecting the dowries; few details are known about how the income was spent because such expenses were not recorded in the account books of the convent records; they were, however, recorded in a separate book of *Doti Spirituali*, which only tells us the name of the daughter, her father and the quantity.³⁷ Given the amount of money recorded in the financial records as “gifts” for individual girls, it seems likely that the dowry acted as an investment or an endowment and that the needs of the convent were met largely from other funding streams such as the annuity from Eleonora’s will and from the budget of Santo Stefano.³⁸

An additional duty of the *cavalieri*, on the practical side, was the inspection of the enclosure. It does not appear that this was a common or regular occurrence, as the Constitution provides for the regular inspection of cells and communal areas by the abbess; however, a detailed description of the procedures of the Prior’s inspection of 1734 in the Santo Stefano Charter illustrates how this may have been taking place up to that point.³⁹ Each room was to be inspected for cleanliness, piety and banned materials while the sisters waited in the chapel. There is no evidence of any contraband discarded

³⁵ ASPi 2878, Proemio. “1821.4.17.”

³⁶ See the works of Stanley Chojnacki; Trevor Dean and Kate Lowe; Richard C. Trexler; Gabriella Zarri.

³⁷ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 635 No 56, “Registro di Ricevute di Doti, 1592-1641.”

³⁸ ASF CRS 134, the Libri Giornali have many entries of monetary gifts to individual women, usually from family members.

³⁹ ASPi 2878, p.402-12.

or confiscated, but these are not the type of notes recorded in the convent's records. On the occasions of such inspections, the highest ranking and most austere nuns were given the responsibility of leading the men around the cells and refectory. In fact, the Constitution in particular notes that many positions within the convent involved interaction with outsiders, even *cavalieri*, were designated specifically to those women who were both over the age of fifty and of a pious nature, perhaps under the assumption that those sisters would be less likely to be tempted by—or to tempt—the visitors.

It was a fact of enclosure that few people would ever see the sisters inside the walls of the convent. It is therefore interesting to note that the wardrobe of the sisters warranted significant attention from both the Charter and the Constitution.⁴⁰ The Charter was primarily concerned with how sisters should be dressed at rituals and the order in which the vestments would be blessed by the prior; also of significance was the mandate that their vestments display the cross of the Order, the very same that the *cavalieri* would have worn on their uniform as their emblem, the same that is the symbol of Pisa today: a red lanceolate-lobed cross on a white background.⁴¹ A portrait known to have belonged to the cloister depicted the first abbess, Umiliana Lenzi, in the white habit and tunic of La Concezione with the cross of Santo Stefano on it. Kate Lowe surmises that the quality

⁴⁰ ASPi 2878; BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Sestodecimo: Degli Abiti, e vestire delle Mon[ach]e Velate e Serventi, p.63-68.

⁴¹ ASPi 2878, Capitolo IV, p.12-17. Venuta di Mons[ignor] Priore alla chiesap..

Essendo il tutto in ordine il clero vestito di costa uà alle stanze di Monsig[no]re Priore, al quale già vestito con tonana bianca e rocchetto, il Cerimoniere gli mette la Cappa magna, e al collo la croce d'oro da Cavaliere, avvolliandogli al bracciò sinistro lo strascico della detta Cappa, e processionalmente va alla chiesa con quest'ordine.

BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Primo, p.5-10.

5. ...Che le Mon[ach]e da Coro vestino di Bianco con la Croce rossa d[ei] Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano.

and stately posing likely make it a commission from the Grand Dukes; however, it could have as easily stemmed from the Order.⁴² She alone is depicted, looking right into the eyes of her beholder; her right hand lies on a closed book, and her left hand holds her official staff on which rests an intricate depiction of the *agnus dei*. This is less a reluctant portrait of a woman serving with humility than the image of a woman possessing authority and wealth. I agree with Lowe's observation that this was probably one of the earliest commissions, as it was most likely an election portrait "showing the newly elected and appointed abbess in all her glory," but I would add that it also represented the regal founding of the convent and the agency of the Order of Santo Stefano as military and religious leaders.⁴³

The Constitution, consistent with its role as day-to-day rule enforcer, was primarily concerned with how garments should be worn: that they would be made of wool in the winter, linen in the summer; how many of each part should be owned per sister; and what garments should, and should not, look like. This last observation is given weight by a reminder at the beginning of the chapter on clothing of the vow of poverty. It is one of the few times that the vow is emphasized, perhaps a more rhetorical than realistic notion. However, a convent with the socio-economic status of La Concezione was unlikely to use only cheap cloth, especially when the well-dressed *cavalieri* were their sponsors. The 1655 date of this handbook indicates that many of its rules were

⁴² It now hangs in the Museo di Sant'Apollonia (a former Benedictine convent) in Florence. The portrait is reprinted in Kate Lowe, "Elections of Abbesses and Notions of Identity in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy with Special Reference to Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54/2 (Summer, 2001): 414. In it, her robes display the cross of Saint Stephen covering most of her torso.

⁴³ Lowe, "Elections of Abbesses," 415.

written down as reminders, perhaps because they had been routinely broken in the past. The Constitution states that there should not be so much silk on their uniforms and that there should not be adornments, such as gold, on them.⁴⁴

It is perhaps only natural that the sisters would want the aristocratic adornments expected of the *cavaliere persona*—their caste and political associations afforded them that privilege. The dress of the sisters emulated that of the cavalieri as well as their church; the main chapel had a large cross that was covered with red and yellow silks; it was modeled after the church of the Order (also constructed from the designs of Giorgio Vasari).⁴⁵ Large amounts of silk (as well as other cloths) were recorded as purchases in the convent financial records. Yellow, red and black are listed in the Charter as the proper colors used in the chapel for sacristerial purposes, including lining the cross; however, the green, blue and pink silk purchases may have been used for other, less sacred objects such as dresses, decorations and hand crafts.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that the Constitution, aside from the chapters on proper clothing, mentions specifically that the dress of those who

⁴⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Sestodecimo: Delli Abiti, e vestire delle Mon[ach]e Velate e Serventi, p.63-68.

Avendo S[an] Bene nel capitolo 55: della sua Regola lasciato in libertà di quelli che sotto di quella volevano militare, l'elezione del colore, e qualità dell'Abito, purché sia di panno uille, e di poco prezzo e per ciò avendo il Ser[enissi]mo Fondatore della Religione Militare di Santo Stefano Papa e Martie nella quale ancor voi siate scritte, eletto la detta Regola, e l'abito bianco di lana con la Croce rossa: così ancora a questo Mona[ster]o, e stato dato nella sua fondazione il mede[sim]o Abito, e confermatoli dal sommo Pontefice Clemente Ottavo ... Abito sia di panno lano dozzinale, e dichiarato che la Cocolla, la Tonaca, lo Scapulare, e i Tonacelli sieno di Saia, e che la Croce rossa sia al lato sinistro dello Scapulare, ... E la Croce rossa non si facci in modo alcuno di materia di seta, ne vergolata d'Oro, ma di panno lucchesino, vergolata di seta gialla tanto nella Tonaca.

⁴⁵ ASPi 2878, Capitolo VIII: Come si de adornare la chiesa interiore, p.112-14.

Nella volta vi si facci una croce da Cav[alier]e assai grande di setini rossi col suo fregio giallo pur di sestini senz'altro ornamento.

⁴⁶ ASF CRS 134. The Libri Giornali contain many entries for purchases of different colors of silks.

were likely to interact with outsiders be of austere uniform.⁴⁷ This requirement was often mentioned with the qualities of mature age, model behavior, and of course, feminine piety.

The status of a daughter living in a convent remained a tentative issue throughout the early modern era. In theory, once a girl took vows, she was no longer part of her family, she held no legal standing as a member of that family and she renounced any right to an inheritance—her dowry was her birthright.⁴⁸ This was not necessarily determined by civil law, but derived from customary practice that concentrated precious wealth into the hands of a few (sons). This practice was certainly not always the case; many families continued to provide emotional and financial support for their daughters, particularly those that could afford to do so. The women at La Concezione, for example, received regular stipends from their families and visits and gifts appear to have been common, particularly on special occasions such as festivals. Curiously, the writers of the Constitution placed a high level of emphasis on the role of relatives (not only the mother and father, but also brothers, sisters and other heads of family as well as any representatives they sent in their stead) regulating times they may and may not visit, their participation in activities and rituals and how they could go about receiving special

⁴⁷ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Nono: Della Maestra, e Pedagoga delle Novizie e Noviziato, p.191; Capitolo Terzodecimo: Dell'Ufizio della Sagrestana; Capitolo Quartodecimo: Delle Portinare, e Rotare del Monastero, p.208.

⁴⁸ Florence had particularly strict rules legislating property inheritance, Francesco Scaduto, *Stato e chiesa sotto Pietro Leopoldo I granduca di Toscana (1765-1790)* (Florence: C. Ademollo 1885), 301; Lorenzo Cantini, *Legislazione Toscana raccolta e illustrate*. (Florence: Albizziniana, 1804), xv, p.155-63. As claimed by Silvia Evangelisti, "Wives, Widows, and Brides of Christ: Marriage and the Convent in the Historiography of Early Modern Italy," *Historical Journal* 43/1 (2000): 242.

permission from the abbess.⁴⁹ The relatives' interactions are most often noted in the chapters concerning rituals and the parlor where girls were permitted to speak with people outside the convent walls. The emphasis on the relatives is undoubtedly connected to the fact that many of those relatives were *cavalieri* and they wanted the right to concern themselves with their daughters and the convent they supported, although it is not clear how much control individuals or families held on the management of the convent. It is worth noting that La Concezione rarely appears in either modern or contemporary literature. Perhaps part of the reason for this is that parental control was so keen as to prevent (or subdue) the sort of scandal that put other convents onto broadsheets and travel logs.⁵⁰

Religious institutions across Catholic Europe followed a similar format for many of their rituals and practices— conformity and consistency were the hallmarks of convents, so it was the details of life, such as titles, dress and traditions that distinguished one convent from another. Many of the customs of a particular institution reflected the culture cultivated by the inhabitants and its patrons. It follows then, that the culture of La Concezione reflected that of the Order. Just as surnames and titles reflected class and status at court, names gave an otherwise indiscernible girl some individuality in a convent. In rhetorical terms, it was proper for a female religious to use the title *suora* once she had professed her vows. Along with this, she discarded her birth name and took

⁴⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, The term “parenti,” meaning “relatives” is far more common than “genitori,” referring to birth parents. Not surprisingly, neither term is used often in the Charter.

⁵⁰ Lowe, “Elections of Abbesses,” 404 mentions a sex scandal involving six nuns and men in 1502-1503 as well as men illicitly gaining entry to convent festivities. See also, Silvia Evangelisti, ““We Do Not Have it, and We Do Not Want It”: Women, Power and Convent Reform in Florence,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34/3 (2003): 677-700.

one of religious significance, often naming herself after a saint. It is known that in wealthy convents, women sometimes took to using the secular title *donna*, leaving *suora* for the lower classes.⁵¹ I have not found this particular aberration to be the case in La Concezione; rather the common titles include *suora*, *madre* for senior members and *maestra* for those holding offices. An interesting and rather unique derivation is the use of *Cavaliere* or *Cavalieressa*. It was the most common title for a woman of La Concezione in the eighteenth century but appears to have been used as early as the inaugural year 1592.⁵² The title is used in both the Santo Stefano and La Concezione documents, perhaps indicating a sense of parity and equality between the knights of Santo Stefano and the women supported by them; at the very least, this indicates that it was not simply an internal designation used amongst the enclosed women as a designation of rank. In the secular world, the title would have been used for the wife of a *cavaliere*, but it was always reserved for a noble woman. Evidence indicates that the women may have addressed each other as *cavaliere* or *cavalieressa*, as a mark of respect and that outsiders may have done the same. “Cav.a” is used as the title of women discussed as a third party

⁵¹ Kate Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145; Sharon T. Strocchia, “Naming a Nun: Spiritual Exemplars and Corporate Identity in Florentine Convents, 1450-1530,” in *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, ed. William J. Connell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 215-40.

⁵² ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 51, Libro Vestiari e Presiori 1592-1734, tomo 2, f.1r.
28 Febraio 1592 [old dating system]: “Vestim[ent]o [per] n[ost]re Monache Cavaliere...”;
BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Tavo Istorico.

The nuns are also referred to as “le dette Religiose, Cavalieresse; but as that section is dated 1814, its reliability on this particular is questionable. However, the author refers to herself as “Cavalieressa dell'Ordine di S[ant]o Stefano P[apa] e Martire.”

and some letters contain the title on the outer cover;⁵³ on the other hand, I have found no direct evidence to date concerning the titles that might have been used in conversation; in fact, the Constitution specifically requires the sisters to address each other as *suora* as opposed to calling them by their name alone.⁵⁴

Of the many ways in which La Concezione and Santo Stefano may have shared cultural products, art and music are perhaps the most easily discernible. Art historians have made great strides in understanding how patrons both inside and outside convent walls shaped the character of an institution and a city. In the case of La Concezione, it is reasonable to expect that family members would have taken an interest in providing the cultural fineries of the patrician class to the sisters. This may have included materials such as books or instruments; artistic products such as a commissioned work for a cell or a musical work; or personnel, hired by the Medici family or the Order, who worked for one or more of the components of this political triangle.

That the Order of Santo Stefano had a strong musical tradition is evident in their records— financial notes record instruments, musicians and compositions that were used by the *cavalieri*.⁵⁵ The Order would have used music not only in their ritual and political exercises, but also in the church that served as their religious center. Of the composers

⁵³ ASPi 2878; ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 75: “Documenti Originali del Priorato Magalotti; Pezzo 44 “Documenti Originali del Monastero Della Santo Stefano Concezione”

⁵⁴ BNCf Mazz. Inv. II II 152, p.191.

14...Tra di loro si respettino non si besticcino, non si dieno del tu, non si chiamino con sopra nomi, ne si chiamino, o nominino l'una l'altra senza il titolo di Suora non si disprezzino con gesti e parole, ne si contraffaccino tra loro, ne altre fuori di loro; e per ciò le M[aest]re uigilino in queste cose; e se incorrono in questi difetti, le faccino chieder perdono l'una l'altra e se non si emendano imponghino loro delle penitnze.

⁵⁵ ASPi 2327, No. 910. Filza Straordinaria; see also Chapter Three.

and performers who taught and learned at this school, it is likely that some were sent to La Concezione to teach or perform.

The Medici family, the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano and the convent of La Concezione engaged in ritualistic, practical and cultural exchanges that today, allow for the political connections that tied them together to be seen as an integrated whole. What affected one, affected the next to some degree.

Convents as an Extension of the Court

A city's convents were more than just physical locations that housed women of various circumstances. Each convent was an enclosure, literally self-contained and at the same time, an integral part of the scheme of its city and rulers. Convents embodied not only the spirituality, rites and specific point of view of their Rule (such as Franciscan, Dominican, or Benedictine); they also reflected the neighborhood community, its sense of identity, and pride; additionally, convents often fulfilled a social need—providing shelter, alms, specific goods and crafts to the community. Each religious institution, by its location, patronage and familial associations, symbolized the philosophical or political ideology of those tangential forces. In the case of La Concezione, the entities of significance were the Order of Santo Stefano and the Medici court—themselves intertwined. The philosophies and political ideologies espoused were female piety, establishing a relationship between God and Florence, fostering Medici power in the local and international forums, deference to familial associations, and providing for the well-being of the daughters of the nobility in an appropriate fashion.

La Concezione was physically located in the northwest corner of the city, adjacent to the ancient and culturally significant church and Dominican monastery of Santa Maria Novella; the seat of governance, the piazza della Signoria, was located more centrally and the Pitti Palace was located south, across the Arno River. However, La Concezione can be seen as an annex of the court through its political proximity and its ideological foundation; the happenings of the court affected the convent just as what happened in the convent affected the court. This sense of the convent as an “extension” of the court can best be viewed with examples found in documents describing some of the ways in which La Concezione participated in courtly life.

La Concezione was sometimes called *il monastero nuovo*, or “the new monastery.” This name is seen often in the documents and appears to be the familiar name Florentines called it, even after it had been in existence for two centuries. The title implies that there was an “old monastery” and in fact, there were several. I believe that the specific “old” convent meant was one of the largest and wealthiest, known as *Le Murate* or “the ones bricked in.” A Benedictine convent established in the Middle Ages, it housed many of the city’s noble daughters and had quite a reputation for finery and extravagant parties.⁵⁶ I have found no correspondence between La Concezione and Le Murate in La Concezione’s archives and the sister institution is rarely referenced. This is surprising not only because they were parallel communities of like Rule, but because the

⁵⁶ Le Murate was certainly not the only convent for wealthy daughters; it was however, a very large, powerful institution, perhaps even the leading convent in the city. It is one of three Italian convents investigated through memoirs by Lowe in *Nuns' Chronicles*.

founding daughters of La Concezione were originally from Le Murate.⁵⁷ In fact, few communications are extant either to or from any other religious institutions; perhaps the intention was to isolate La Concezione from the potentially more controversial institutions fearing that too close of a connection would tarnish the pristine image of La Concezione, particularly in its early years.

This isolationism further proves that the Order of Santo Stefano had complete control over La Concezione—to the extent that the convent had little need for interaction with entities outside the Court-Order-Convent triangle. The Medici family and the Order intended to establish a convent that was not only the most “elite” but also the most “pious” and then claim it as their righteous victory as defenders of both State and Faith. As Le Murate was a well-established convent by the time of the Medici Grand Dukes, by appropriating a few of their members (and therefore the good standing of the convent) and transforming them into members of the “new monastery,” the Medici family was able to affix their own spiritual and political mark on Florentine religious life. As the turn of the sixteenth century was a time in which all of Europe was in a state of religious and imperial upheaval, the establishment of La Concezione would have been a powerful sign from the newly re-established Medici court of their power to bring about stability and devotion.

The brief histories found in both the Charter from Santo Stefano and the Constitution from La Concezione provide significant clues concerning how the opening

⁵⁷ The convent of Le Murate was located in the southeast corner of the city, just north of the Arno River. Today it is under reconstruction after having been a women’s prison during the previous two centuries.

of the new convent was celebrated. This was an opportunity for lavish pageantry and for making a political statement. Erecting a convent was a matter of public interest, and as the Medici (and by extension, the *Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*) wished to be seen as patrons of devotion and good taste, high dignitaries were invited to partake in a certain amount of pomp. As depicted at the beginning of this chapter, there was a procession, ostensibly leading from Le Murate to La Concezione, which would have passed directly through the Signoria, a center of the Medici court and of Florentine civic life (indeed, a symbolic governing space that the Medici were eager to claim as “theirs”).

The 1592 procession was a grand event, one that brought the court outside. As the women led the procession from Le Murate to La Concezione, the townspeople were likely to have attended. A procession of this sort was a rare opportunity to see a ‘bride of Christ’ outside the cloister and it would have attracted those interested in seeing the Medici dignitaries.

Five of the most devout and exemplary nuns from the renowned Monastery of Le Murate were those who introduced the cloistered life into that noble Monastery. The first abbess was the Mother Suor Umiliana de Lenzi, who left with [the office of abbess] that Monastery of the Murate on the 4th of October 1592 together with Antonio Benivieni, Vicar General [of Santo Stefano] and four other Sisters, who were Oretta Sapiti, Clemenzia d’Aro Spagnola, Laura Aldobrandini and Laudomina Malatesta as appears from the notarial act of X Francesco Frosini, the public notary. In order to make this function more memorable, the Grand Duchess Cristina di Lorena, and the Princess Maria, who then rose to the Throne of France, accompanied by Lady Francesca Orsini of the Count of Pitigliano, received the said Sisters in their carriages with a great retinue of nobility, and led them to the new enclosure. They entered the interior chapel of the new Monastery, [and] the said Vicar placed in possession of said Abbess Suor Umiliana [the dignity of her office] delivering to her the Angelic

[Benedictine] Rule, and the keys and made her companions [swear] to obey her.⁵⁸

Here the Charter goes to lengths to describe some of the details of the founding day whereas the version of this story from the Constitution does not mention the women's pious nature or how they processed or who was in attendance, only that the named women were selected by Duke Ferdinando with the permission of the Pope.⁵⁹ This difference lies less in the intention of the documents than in their place in the historical narrative. The Charter was a contemporary document; the details of the founding were probably recorded near the time of the event, but the story as told in the Constitution

⁵⁸ ASPi 2878, Proemio.

Cinque Monache delle più provette, ed esemplari del rinomato Mona[ster]o delle Murate, furono quelle, che introdussero in sì nobil Mona[ster]o la vita claustrale e la prima Abbadessa fu la Madre Suor Umiliana de Lenzi, che esci con tal carattere dal detto Mona[ster]o delle Murate il di quattro di Ottobre 1592 insieme con Antonio Benivieni Vicario Generale, e quatraltre Sorelle, che furono Oretta Sapiti, chimenza d'Aro Spagnola, Laura Aldobrandini e Laudomina Malatesta come appare [per] rogito di x Francesco Frosini Notaio pubblico. Per render più memorabile questa funzione la Gran D[uche]ssa Cristina di Lorena, e la Principessa Maria, che poi sali al sono di Francia accompagnate da Donna Fran[cesc]a Orsini de' Conti di Pitigliano, riceverono nelle propie carrozze le dette Monache con sequito grande di Nobiltà, e quelle condussero alla nuova clausura, intrate che furono nel Coro interiore del nuovo Mona[ster]o il detto Vicario messe in possero di detta dignità di Badessa Suor Umiliana consegnandole la Regola [b] Angello, e le chiavi e le fece render Obbedienza dalle compagne.

NB: Professor Luisa Nardini points out that *con tal carattere* in the above passage could mean that she left Le Murate as abbess and maintained her position.

Janet Cox-Rearick stated that the nuns of Le Murate "moved into the convent in July 1592." "*La Ill.ma Sig.ra Duchessa felice memoria: The Posthumous Eleonora di Toledo*," in *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchessa of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 235. She refers to ASF MP 280, f.162r, a letter to Alessandro di Ottaviano de Medici dated 23 July 1592 but does not quote the letter.

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605 is the first Libro Giornale and has as its first entry for the inhabited convent, 4 Ottobre 1592, this is confirmed by the Constitution and the Charter, therefore the July date is most likely mistaken or misread.

⁵⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Tavo Istorico.

Successe a questi Ferdinando figliuolo delle Altezze Loro, e non solo terminò la fabbrica, secondo quello ideato aveva la generosa Istitutrice, ma in quello fece passare cinque monache, ch'ecolle debite permissioni del sommo Pontefice Clemente VIII Levò dal venerabile monastero delle Murate, che furono la Rev[erend]a madre Suor Umiliana Lensi, Suor Gretta Sapiti, Suor Clemenzia d'Aro Spagniuola, Suor Laura Aldobrandini, Suor Laudomina Malatest[a], e la detta Suor Umilana Lensi fu eletta Abbadessa, e Governò, sino che visse.

comes from a section that was written in the nineteenth century. It probably took as its source common knowledge or details noted in other convent documents.

The fact that so many people of note attended, and that they were recorded in the Charter, makes clear that the opening ceremonies and festivities were an international affair; as affirmed by the Constitution's rendering of events. This would have been an opportunity for Ferdinando to create a grand spectacle worthy of the rising Tuscan court and in doing so, increase the visibility of Medici wealth, patronage and spiritual devotion:

Great and special was the transport of the said Nuns to their new Home where they were to be Mothers, and teachers of the future school girls; besides the [presence of] leading nobility, what is remarkable is that they were honored by the presence of the Serene Grand Duchess Madame Cristina di Lorena, and accompanied in a Carriage by the company of the Serene Princess Maria daughter of the Grand Duke of blessed memory. In later [years] the Convent was enlarged, and said Convent [was] amplified by the Most Serene Cosimo [III] Medici Grand Master of the Order of Santo Stefano Pope, and Martyr.⁶⁰

It is worth noting that the women were transported in a “carriage”— but whether it was enclosed or open is not indicated in the documents. Perhaps the political effect of their transport and subsequent procession would have been diminished by a closed carriage that precluded the visual effect; on the other hand, so soon after the Council of

⁶⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Tavo Istorico.

Grande, e speciale fu il trasporto a dette Religiose al nuovo loro [Abitovo] ove dovevano essere Madri, e maestre delle future alunne, ed oltre alla primaria nobiltà, quello, che è rimarcabile si è, che furono onorate della presenza della Serenissima Granduchessa Madama Cristina di Lorena, e accompagnate in una Carrozza in compagnia della Serenissima Principessa Maria Figliuola del Granduca di Felice memoria; In seguito fu ingrandito, ed ampliato detto Convento dal serenissimo Cosimo Medici Grand maestro dell'Ordine di S[anto] Stefano Papa e Matire. ASPi 2878, Proemio.

Di più nel primo chiostro di detta clausura vi è un pozzo che si domanda della Regina; tal nome fu dato dalla ser[enissim]a Prin[cipess]a Maria già dichiarata Regina di Francia, la quale si portò un giorno nel sopradetto Mona[ster]o e quando fu da quel Pozzo volle bere di essa acqua dicendo da qui avanti si domanderà il Pozzo della Regina come sino ad presente vien chiamato.

Trent, certainly it would have been neglectful to break enclosure in such a public manner. On the matter of “nun travel,” little seems to be known. As this example illustrates, there were instances when this was required; further research into this topic is needed.

It is likely that by 1592, Ferdinando had in his plans to marry off his niece Maria in a grand fashion, in 1600 she was married to Henry IV of France in Florence. The spectacles of the wedding are well studied.⁶¹ It is likely that the convent of La Concezione repaid the new Queen with their participation in her wedding festivities; this may have come in the form of presents or gifts to the couple, handcrafts for the festivities, poems, music or theatrical performances and certainly a special Mass.⁶² The wedding party may have even stopped at the convent as they toured around Florence displaying their finery, civic patriotism and Catholic devotion.⁶³

Certainly, the pageantry of the procession to the convent in 1592 was aimed at drawing the eye of the Pope, Clement VIII. After the Council of Trent, there was a push for appropriate female piety, and an enclosed convent of wealthy noblewomen was the exact model that would have been favorable to a new Pope’s policies. It would have been important then, to choose exactly the right women from the right convent at the right

⁶¹ Tim Carter, “Rediscovering *Il rapimento di Cefalo*” *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 9/1 (2003); Tim Carter, “*Non occorre nominare tanti musici*: Private Patronage and Public Ceremony in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence,” *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4. (1991): 89-104; Warren Kirkendale, *Emilio de’ Cavalieri "gentiluomo romano": His Life and Letters, his Role as Superintendent of All the Arts at the Medici Court, and his Musical Compositions--With Addenda to L'Aria di Fiorenza and The Court Musicians in Florence*. *Historiae musicae cultores* no: 86 (Florence: Olschki, 2001).

⁶² For example, ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.136v.
23 Settembre 1600: A spese gen[era]le [lire] venti und.4 che [lire] 4.4 [per] libro 12 di mandorle il resto [per] il.e 12 di zuchero [per] presentare la Principessa Maria oggi, Regina di francia d Cardinalo Aldob[randin]i e qualc[os']altro benofat[to]re.

⁶³ This point in particular would have been important because Maria was later responsible for turning France away from the Hapsburgs and Protestantism and towards Spain and Catholicism through her regency, politics and her children’s marriage alliances.

moment in history to make the most effective and politically advantageous demonstration of the Medici family's power.

Why did it take thirty years to move the first inhabitants into the new monastery? Eleonora established the financial basis as well as the political foundation for La Concezione in her will in 1562, Cosimo officially began the project in 1563 and building materials were being sent in 1568. In 1588, the convent is first mentioned in the records of Santo Stefano, and in 1592, the first inhabitants moved in. It could certainly have taken that long to build it (after all, the Duomo went the better part of a century without a ceiling) but given the Medici family's interest in seeing this project to fruition, perhaps there was another, more political reason.⁶⁴

Convent creation was more than just monetary and logistical maneuvering; there were also spiritual and hierarchical matters to consider. Any religious institution required the support of the local church authorities and that of the Papacy. Perhaps the Medici family was waiting for the right ecclesiastical/political moment to seek official sanction for the convent of La Concezione.

The approval for the convent came from Clement VIII, who was elected Pope in January 1592.⁶⁵ Interestingly, Clement VIII, formerly Ippolito Aldobrandini, was a wealthy Florentine lawyer, and one of the founding daughters, and second abbess of La

⁶⁴ During the early years of the convent's development, three Medici men were in power; Cosimo until his retirement in 1564, Francesco until his death in 1585, then Ferdinando until his death in 1609; it is certainly possible that the changes in leadership caused some of the delay in constructing and opening the convent.

⁶⁵ Note that his papal name was previously held by Clement VII, formerly Giulio di Giuliano de' Medici, (r. 1523-1534).

Concezione, was his niece, Laura Aldobrandini.⁶⁶ That a political connection exists for some, if not all, of the founding daughters is not unexpected. Conservatively, I would suggest that the five women were chosen not only for their piety and service to Le Murate, but also for their family's political status as members of the Medici court and as *cavalieri* of the Order of Santo Stefano. The honor may have been bestowed upon Laura as a favor to Pope Clement VIII, or as part of the agreement that sanctioned La Concezione as a legitimate convent.

Concerning the other founding sisters, I have not yet found a special significance to the names Umiliana Lensi, or Gretta Sapiti. However, Clemenzia d'Aro Spagniuola's name implies that she was from a Spanish family, perhaps one that had been part of Eleonora's courtly entourage. Laudomina Malatesta came from a well-established Italian family that was clearly connected to Eleonora's court.⁶⁷

Aside from the probable grandeur of the opening ceremonies, the Medici continued to engage La Concezione as part of their courtly celebrations. This would have

⁶⁶ Pompeo Litta, et. al., *Famiglie celebri italiane* (Milano: P.E. Giusti, 1819), vol.5, D.66, f.444. Her father Giorgio was born in 1508 and was a member of Cosimo's military forces; Laura professed at Le Murate before Fredinando transferred her to La Concezione.

⁶⁷ The Malatesta family is infamous for the appearance of one member as a villain in Dante's *Inferno*; a conference at UCLA in August 2006 addressed issues of the family. Also: Pompeo Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane* (Milano: P.E. Giusti, 1819), vol.13 Disp.162 fol.1123:

Laudomia: "Fattosi necessario di toglierla di mano alla madre, l'accorse in sua casa il cardinale Accolti suo parente allora rifugiato in Firenze; il quale la collocò fra le damigelle d'onore nella corte di Eleonora di Toledo moglie del duca Cosimo I. Preferendo peraltro la vita religiosa, andò a racchiudersi tra le benedettine del Mona[ster]o delle Murate, dove si distinse tanto per esimia pietà, che quando la pia Gran Duchessa Cristina istituì l'ordine delle suore cavalieresse di Santo Stefano, fondando per esse il Mona[ster]o della Concezione in via della Scala, Laudomia fu tra le prescelte a stabilirvi la regola monastica; e fattavi la sua professione prendendo il nuovo abito, siccome aveva ordinato il pontefice, nel 1593, perseverò fino alla morte nell'esercizio continuo delle virtù ch'erano proprie dello stato che aveva scelto." She died in 1597 according to convent documents, ASF CRS 134: Figliuola di Giovanbattista e Virginia di Bernardo Accolti signore di Nepi. or Vittoria di Alfonso.

been likely during the most important solemn feasts of the liturgical year such as Easter, Pentecost and Christmas, but also, and perhaps more significantly, during the feast of Santo Stefano as mentioned above. The feast would have had local significance to the *cavalieri*, the sisters of La Concezione, and the Medici court.

The feast day of Pope Stephen the Martyr was celebrated every 2 August by the convent, the court and the Order.⁶⁸ As noted in the Constitution, this included a sung (polyphonic) Mass, a marker of respect and reverence. Eleonora and Ferdinando also received annual festivities in this manner, and it appears that the death of any Grand Duke warranted a sung mass as well, but on the death of the archbishops of Florence, only a spoken Mass was said.⁶⁹ The difference in celebrations certainly indicates the separation of Medici versus non-Medici occasions in the eyes of the convent. It also displays the convent's contribution to the court's remembrance and memorialization of important people, specifically, the recently deceased rulers who, thanks to La Concezione, had their own personal intercessors.

The jurisdiction of La Concezione was unusual for a Florentine convent; at most institutions, the local monks and friars performed the rites and served as a convent's confessors. This in turn was overseen by the ecclesiastical authorities of the archbishop, cardinal and then the pope. At La Concezione, no local Benedictine monks are mentioned as playing any role in the spiritual well-being of the convent, and the *cavalieri* are given

⁶⁸ Pope Stephen's martyrdom is questionable; none the less, he died 2 August 257 AD. Raymond Davis, trans. *The book of pontiffs (liber pontificalis): the ancient biographies of the first ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Cinquantesimo: Dell'Estequie, delle Mon[ach]e morte, e loro Sufragi, p.154-55.

explicit rights of governorship except in the issue of *clausura*, which was related to the to several papal decrees, including those of the Council of Trent.⁷⁰ Aside from a few blanket decrees from the city authorities to all of the city's convents, there was virtually no oversight outside the Medici court, and the pope is only mentioned in the few cases where his explicit permission was required. These include the original creation of the convent, for which Pope Clement VIII bequeathed his blessings, and some special licenses for Maria Cristina to leave the convent for short periods of time.⁷¹

There is a fascinating connection to be made between the Medici court's Order of Santo Stefano and its support of La Concezione and a parallel arrangement in Spain.⁷² Juana de Austria, the Princess of Portugal, Regent, and sister to Philip II the King of Spain, established a Franciscan convent in the mid-sixteenth century called the *Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales* for royal and noble (Hapsburg) daughters that was literally attached to the palace. According to Janet Hathaway, it provided a model of piety for the women of the court, and its political and physical location helped to establish

⁷⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Primo, p.5-10.

5. Che detto Mona[ster]o, Bad[ess]a, e Mon[ach]e e sua Beni rendite e ragioni e attioni temporali sieno Esenti dalla Jurisdizione dell'Arcivescovo di firenze e suo Vicario, ma sotto la Jur[isdizion]e del Ser[enissim]o Gran Duca di Toscano, Gran Maestro della Religione dei Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano Papa e Martire e nello Spirituale sotto la cura, reggimento, Jur[isdizion]e, visita, e superiorita dell'Ill[ustrissim]o et Rev[erend]o Mons[ignor]e Priore de Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano; e Solamente sieno soggette all' Arci[vescov]o di Firenza e suo Vic[ari]o quanto alla Clausura, conforme a gli ordini del Sacro Concilio Tridentino. Che le Mon[ach]e da Coro vestino di Bianco con la Croce rossa d[ei] Cav[alier]i di Santo Stefano e faccino la Professione conforem al sacro Concilio Tridentino.

⁷¹ Several letters are extant that attest to examples of Maria Cristina leaving the convent to attend parties and performances at the Medici court or the Villa Poggio. Documentary Sources for the Arts and Humanities, The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID # 6654 and 6800.

⁷² Janet Hathaway, "Cloister, Court and City: Musical Activity of the Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales (Madrid), ca. 1620-1700" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2005).

authority for the new crown.⁷³ It too played an important spiritual role for the ruling powers—the daughters were expected to act as intercessors on behalf of the crown.⁷⁴ Eleonora may have been influenced by the actions of the Spanish court; certainly, she would have known about the major political and spiritual happenings of her ancestral home. *Descalzas* opened its doors in 1559, just three years before Eleonora allowed for the establishment of a courtly convent in her will. While this may be a coincidence, it is true that the idea of combining religion and political power in a positive and reinforcing setting (a convent) would have been attractive to all European courts seeking to establish their legitimacy.

Eleonora's actions were likely a combination of four forces: her own sense of devotion that prompted her to leave a lasting mark on Florence; Cosimo's founding of a male Order attached to the court; the model of another court (and specifically her "home" court of Spain), which successfully combined piety and politics; and the widespread directives of the Catholic Reformation and the Council of Trent.

Women and Convents as Political Strategy

Our modern notion of convents is one in which young women, perhaps in their late teens or twenties, decide that they are called to serve God—they forsake the world and live their entire lives happily devoted to their religion. The reality is that most women

⁷³ Hathaway, *Cloister, Court and City*, 9.

⁷⁴ Hathaway, *Cloister, Court and City*, 11, fn 7 quotes Maria Leticia Ruiz Gomez, "Princesses and Nuns: The Convent of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid" on the roles of the royally enclosed to "perform the religious duties which the Spanish monarchy relied on to secure divine intercession on its behalf in the complex affairs of state."

before the modern era had little say in the decisions as to their life path; in early modern Italy, the primary options were marriage or the convent. However, in an era of limited alternatives, some women may have considered the convent their best option; a woman who did not wish to marry for personal reasons such as a distaste for men or fear of an early death due to childbirth may have asked to live out her years in a convent; a second daughter may have seen it as her duty to her family to serve God in an enclosure so that her sister's marriage might bring the family greater prosperity or political connections; and certainly some women were truly committed to the devotional life—a number of the hagiographies of the Middle Ages and Renaissance begin with a girl whose father had arranged a marriage which she refused—subsequently demanding to be sent to the convent.⁷⁵

Typically, a girl was sent to be a nun between the ages of twelve and sixteen when she became a novice; between sixteen and twenty-one she professed and became a veiled nun and between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, she was considered a mature member of the community with full rights, including the ability to hold office. Holders of some offices, such as that of Abbess and those near the public eye, were often required to be above the age of forty. The decrees of the Council of Trent mandated certain minimum ages for admittance because before the Catholic Reformation, girls were sent as early as a few months after birth. A further discussion of the effects of the Council of Trent on convent life can be found in Chapter One.

⁷⁵ Kelley Harness, "Chaste Warriors and Virgin Martyrs in Florentine Musical Spectacle," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding (New York, London: Routledge, 2002), 73-121; and Matter, "The Personal and the Paradigm."

A convent's population was not limited to this type of *suora velata* or *professa*; the other main category of inhabitants were the *converse*, or servant nuns. These women typically came from the poorer classes; their dowries would have been significantly smaller or nothing at all. The *converse* took simple vows but were not considered full nuns and often had fewer or no privileges. A third group were transient residents—this group would have included the *educande*—young girls who came to the convent for schooling. Many convents were founded with the mission of providing girls a broad-based, religiously-suffused education. A standard convent education would have included lessons on learning to read the Bible, writing and rhetoric (as appropriate to their station), basic math, reading music, singing or playing an instrument and the most important lesson, the virtues. This above all else was the reason girls were sent to live and learn in convents. Other temporary inhabitants would have included young women who were already betrothed who could be sent to a convent for a few years until it was time for the marriage ceremony; this placement protected the girl and her dowry because it ensured that her virginity would be intact, and it also prepared her for the responsibilities of marriage such as obedience, virtue, literacy and even book-keeping skills. This strategy was most common with upper class families whose political wrangling and dowry haggling could drag on for years between betrothal and the consummation of the marriage.⁷⁶ Married women might stay in a convent for a short period of time (although

⁷⁶ Sharon T. Strocchia, "Taken into Custody: Girls and Convent Guardianship in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 17/2 (2003): 177-200.

long stays were discouraged by the Council of Trent) if they were in need of safe haven or in times of war, famine or disease.

A fourth group of women who availed themselves of enclosure were widows. It was not uncommon for a woman to be widowed and remarried several times in her life; if at the end of her reproductive usefulness, she chose to live among women rather than in the home of her children, this was quite acceptable, even preferable. The convent was also a refuge for widows who did not wish to remarry. These women, often young, faced pressure from their families to continue their role as secular women, and the convent provided a virtuous retirement. Widows in particular played an important role in a convent because of the knowledge, political contacts, money and belongings that they brought with them. If a woman loved music in her secular life, she might bring her lute, spinet, manuscripts and vocal prowess to share with the community as a teacher or soloist.

At La Concezione, the vast majority of the inhabitants were professed nuns, as discussed in the Introduction: this included daughters from the very best families as well as the first family. The convent accepted a limited number of women, and anyone accepted above this limit was called a *supernumeraria*. Such women paid an extra fee but were otherwise treated essentially the same. The convent records indicate that a girl could only be moved off the supernumerary list when a *professa* died.⁷⁷ A few *educande* are found in the records but this was not a means of supporting the community as it was in other institutions. I have found no mention of widows, either in the Constitution or in the

⁷⁷ ASF CRS 134, Filze Diverse.

financial records; most of the inhabitants entered between the ages of twelve and sixteen, the age at which they could enter their novitiate year, and they professed soon after their sixteenth birthday.

Given the convent's original contract and mandate, it is reasonable to expect that the women who entered it were of the highest-ranking families in Tuscany. But what is surprising is that the *converse* were not ordinary peasant girls, as they were in most other upper-class convents: the Charter mandates that at the time a girl applied for admission as a novice, she also had to submit for approval the names of any converse she intended to bring with her.⁷⁸ The Constitution mandates that converse had to be from legitimate, honorable families; unlike in other convents, the converse were expected to pay a dowry. Also worthy of noting is that the servants were expected to be able to read as well as recite liturgy; this implies that they came from the literate lower nobility or merchant classes, rather than the largely illiterate lower classes.⁷⁹ The families of such daughters may have been seeking upward mobility, or at least the appearance of such.⁸⁰

Several issues become evident when examining the Charter of La Concezione by the Order of Santo Stefano and the Constitution from within the walls of the convent. In

⁷⁸ ASPi 2878. Capitolo 1. De requisiti p[er] le Fanciulle, che devono ricever l'abito Monache, p.1-3. La Fanciulla non puo esser accettata, parlo delle Velate, se prima di commissione della Sacra Religione di Santo Stefano non sia fatto il Processo de gradi della sua nobiltà, come anco de vita e moribus, il che in questa parte son tenute a provare anche le Converse.

⁷⁹ This contrasts with the servant class of nuns in Siena who were released from singing the Daily Offices so that they had more time for their labors. Colleen Reardon, *Holy Concord Within Sacred Walls: Nuns and Music in Siena, 1575-1700* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2000), 200.

⁸⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo sesto: Dell'Ufizio che devono dire le Serventi, p.98.

the first place, politics infused every aspect of the convent. Not only was the founding of the convent the last political maneuver of a dying grand duchess; its opening was an international spectacle that helped to elevate the city of Florence and its ruling family in the eyes of the citizens and their European peers; its day-to-day operations and special occasions were an extension of Medicean wealth, patronage and governance; its very make-up was a political statement that those families who supported the Medici would be rewarded; and its closure marked the final end of Medici rule in Tuscany. The Medici family created an entire institution primarily dedicated to praying to God on behalf of the family, the court and the Order. The examples established here mark La Concezione as a special institution that was given privileged favor in the city, and because the families which sent their daughters there were the very finest of the nobility, La Concezione was ensured all of the splendor and advantages to which the daughters felt entitled.

Musically, the institutions were connected through the performers of vocal and instrumental works who were employed by each institution. It is to this subject that the next chapter turns.

Chapter Three

The Music of the Medici Court and the Order of Santo Stefano

The musical culture of a convent disbanded two hundred years ago is difficult to ascertain with any certainty, even under the best documentary circumstances. Crucial contextual information comes from a survey of the musical culture that existed around the convent. This includes the centers of musical activity in proximity to the convent, the activities of local composers, patrons and performers associated with the convent and the inhabitants' families, and the prevailing philosophical concepts about music in the cultural spheres that were most closely connected to the institution. The primary sources of artistic and musical influence, patronage, personnel and material goods would have come from those who had access to the convent and the women who lived there; hence, the propinquity of those forces as well as their engagement with musical trends had the greatest impact on the musical culture inside the cloister.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the convent of La Concezione relied on its political connections with both the Medici court of Florence and the Order of Santo Stefano in Pisa for its religious and economic underpinnings. Equally important was the social network that these associations provided the sisters. One result of strict clausura was that the women of La Concezione had very little contact with people beyond their immediate family members and representatives of the Order. It follows then, that the majority of musical influences would have been facilitated by the *monsignor priore*,

cappellano, cherico, or the confessore— as the administrators of the convent's affairs.

Additional patrons, such as the grand duchess could also have been responsible for introducing personnel, materials and performances to the convent community. These benefactors could arrange for the proper introduction of teachers and composers and they could aid in hiring singers and instrumentalists. This chapter will provide an overview of the culture fostered by the Medici court and the Order of Santo Stefano as well as specific evidence of outside musical influences that permeated La Concezione.

Music at the Court of the Medici

Florence has long been held as a musical capital of Europe and the Medici family is well known for their patronage of music and the arts.¹ Numerous scholarly studies

¹ Bartoli Bacherini, and Maria Adelaide, *"Per un regale evento": spettacoli nuziali e opera in musica alla corte dei Medici* (Florence: Centro Di, 2000); Tim Carter, "Music-Printing in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, Cristofano Marescotti and Zanobi Pignoni," *Early Music History: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music* 9 (1990): 27-72; Anthony M. Cummings, *The Politicized Muse: Music for Medici Festivals, 1512-1537* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); and "A Florentine Sacred Repertory from the Medici Restoration: (Manuscript II. I. 232 of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)" (Ph.D. diss. Princeton University, 1980); Iain Fenlon, and James Haar, *The Italian Madrigal in the Early Sixteenth Century: Sources and Interpretation* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women's Voices: Music, Art and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); John Walter Hill, "The Musical Chapel of the Florence Cathedral in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century: Vitali, Comparini, Sapiti, Cerri," in *Atti del VII centenario del Duomo di Firenze. III: Cantate Domino--Musica nei secoli per il Duomo di Firenze* (Florence: Edifir, 2001), 175-94; and "Florence: Musical Spectacle and Frama, 1570-1650," in *The Early Baroque Era from the Late Sixteenth Century to the 1660s*, ed. Curtis Price (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 121-45; Warren Kirkendale, "The Myth of the "Birth of Opera," in "The Florentine Camerata Debunked by Emilio de' Cavalieri--A Commemorative Lecture" *Opera Quarterly* 19/4 (Fall 2003): 631-43; and *Emilio de' Cavalieri "gentiluomo romano": His Life and Letters, his Role as Superintendent of All the Arts at the Medici Court, and his Musical Compositions--With Addenda to L'Aria di Fiorenza and The Court Musicians in Florence*. Series: *Historiae musicae cultores* no: 86. Florence: Olschki, 2001; *The Court Musicians in Florence During the Principate of the Medici: With a Reconstruction of the Artistic Establishment*. *Historiae musicae cultores* biblioteca no: 61. Florence: Olschki, 1993; Ekart Marchand and Alison Wright, eds. *With and Without the Medici, Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage, 1434-1530*, (London: Ashgate, 1998); Timothy J. McGee, "In the Service of the Commune: The Changing Role of Florentine Civic Musicians, 1450-1532," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30/3

account for religious and civic displays that relied heavily on music—the studies of Medicean weddings in particular have proved fruitful ground for understanding the role music played in the lives of the Renaissance patriciate.² Much of the research has focused on either the republican Medici *de facto* rules of Cosimo the Elder and Lorenzo the Magnificent of the fifteenth century or the so-called *Florentine camerata* of the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with an emphasis on the ostentatious secular events of the court, rather than the smaller more intimate music making occasions or the many sacred events, chapels and institutions that the Medici are known to have patronized. Most of the published research on the music of the grand ducal court has focused on the years between the mid-sixteenth century during Cosimo I's reign, and the opening decades of the seventeenth century during the reign of his grandson Cosimo II, although Kelley Harness' work on female patronage in the 1620s is a welcomed recent addition.

(Fall 1999): 727-43; Alyson McLamore, Irene Alm, and Colleen Reardon, eds. *Musica Franca: Essays in honor of Frank A. D'Accone* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon 1996); A.M. Nagler, *Theatre Festivals of the Medici, 1539-1637* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976); Elvira Gabero Zorzi, and Mario Sperenzi, *Teatro e spettacolo nella Firenze dei Medici: Modelli dei luoghi teatrali* (Florence: Olschki, 2001).

² Tim Carter, "Rediscovering *Il rapimento di Cefalo*," *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 9/1 (2003); and "Lamenting Ariadne?" *Early Music* 27/3 (1999): 395-405; and "Non occorre nominare tanti musici: Private Patronage and Public Ceremony in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4. Florence: Olschki, 1985); and "A Florentine Wedding of 1608," *Acta Musicologica* 55/1 (1983): 89-107; Kelley Harness, "La Flora and the End of Female Rule in Tuscany," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 437-76; John Walter Hill, "O che nuovo miracolo!: A New Hypothesis about the Aria di Fiorenza," in *In cantu et in sermone: for Nino Pirrotta on his 80th Birthday* (Florence: Olschki 1989), 283-322; Andrew C. Minor, and Bonner Mitchell, *A Renaissance Entertainment: Festivities for the Marriage of Cosimo I, Duke of Florence, in 1539* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1968); James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as theatrum mundi* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Nina Treadwell, "Music of the Gods: Solo Song and *effetti meravigliosi* in the Interludes for *La pellegrina*," *Current Musicology* 83 (Spring 2007): 33-84.

Warren Kirkendale, in his account of court musicians, notes that the number of salaried singers and instrumentalists during these years was fairly consistent until the sobering reign of Ferdinando II after the regency when the number of court musicians was reduced by half.³ As in many European courts, music was used as a public display of wealth and prestige—well-attended performances allowed the host to show off the talents of the court as well as the ever increasing opulence of court productions; patronage provided opportunities to promote a ruler's virtues through printed dedications; and carefully selected subject matter for opera and song texts could convey political meaning. Cosimo I in particular was keen to use music as part of his plan for establishing his legitimacy as leader of the new European power.

In the sixteenth century, as the power of guilds declined, Cosimo seized the opportunity to control the movement and employment of musicians. Under grand ducal aegis, the chapel singers of the Baptistery of the Duomo were reinstated in the 1540s with a great flourish of activity after a period of political unrest.⁴ This complement of (male) singers was hired specifically to sing polyphony—the rich counterpoint popular at the time and the complexity of the harmonies would have seemed a reflection of the potency of the patron. The Baptistery, like the Cathedral and the church of Santissima Annunziata (in addition to several musical lay confraternities) enjoyed large singing forces from bass to sopranos singers supplied in part by the several schools that were operated in the

³ Kirkendale, *Court Musicians*, 39-40.

⁴ Frank A. D'Accone, "The Musical Chapels at the Florentine Cathedral and Baptistery During the First Half of the 16th Century," in *Music and musicians in 16th-century Florence* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 1-50.

chapels; the result was a strong, ongoing tradition of polyphonic music that utilized contemporary musical trends and performed regularly for the Florentine public.

Each successive duke maintained a payroll of not only cathedral musicians, but also singers and instrumentalists who performed solely, or at least primarily, for the pleasure of the court.⁵ This included men as well as a few women, the most famous example of which is Francesca Caccini; musicians performed for not only for the grand festivities— many of which have left documentary evidence— but also for smaller events held in personal quarters for friends and family, about which little was documented. Many of these performers continued to be employed by the subsequent dukes; one result was that the center of Tuscan musical culture became the court—the dukes hired the best musicians to perform works commissioned from the leading composers of the day. In the early modern era, Florence’s contribution to musical development was significant, as D’Accone summarizes:

In the last years of the 16th century, composers in Florence, as they had done with the madrigal, once again led the way in the development of the new genre of opera and of a novel style of reciting verses to music that was one of the essential components. By that time, however, musical activity had developed around ducal patronage.⁶

The years at end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century have left a fascinating documentary trail— an opportunity for scholars to observe the creation of a new genre within a localized context that was highly dependant on court patronage (at least initially) for its inception, publication, performance and ultimately its

⁵ Kirkendale, *Court Musicians*.

⁶ Frank A. D’Accone, *Music and musicians in 16th-century Florence* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), xvi.

spread across Europe. Although the exact origin of opera continues to be a subject of debate, it is accepted that the early participants were within the Florentine artistic sphere and that the Medicean weddings of 1589, 1600 and 1608 provided grand venues for experimentation with new styles and genres.

Weddings were not the only occasions for musical expenses. Kirkendale found that in the mid-seventeenth century, the annual payments to musicians totaled an astounding 3200 to 4300 scudi.⁷ Most of this sum was for the salaries of full-time employees; the number of singers and instrumentalists varied from year to year and from duke to duke. Kirkendale provides detailed biographies on many of the musicians organized by ducal reign— between 1543 and 1737, one hundred and seventy-three musicians were paid a regular salary at the pleasure of the duke.

While these musicians were contracted to the court, they were often permitted to find supplemental employment at local churches and convents. Musicians may or may not have been paid for their services at some chapels, probably depending on the circumstances of the performance and the relationship between the church and the court. A daughter of the Albizi family, as a sister of the convent of Santa Felicità, asked to borrow ducal musicians for a particular feast in the 1640s; the musicians did not receive financial compensation so perhaps this was instead of another service they would have provided the court.⁸ If this arrangement was common between convents and the court,

⁷ Kirkendale, *Court Musicians*, 43.

⁸ Kirkendale, *Court Musicians*, 649-50.

many musical performances probably went unrecorded because there was no expense for which to account.

As with other servants of the Medici family, musicians might have traveled with the family, could have been “loaned” to local churches or they could be sent to perform with the musicians of another court. However, the Florentine singers and players of the court were not the only band of ducal hired musicians in Tuscany. The Duke’s other court, that of his knighthood, also maintained a chapel. It is likely that the Medici court and the Order of Santo Stefano shared many artistic influences, although such connections remain relatively unstudied—however, it is all but certain that the two large, wealthy entities over which the Duke had dominion exchanged musical influences, both in terms of personnel and in terms of materials. Salaried performers and teachers could easily have moved between the various Tuscan locations used by the Medici and composers could have written music that appropriately reflected both the civil court and the chivalric order. Significant occasions, such as the feast of Saint Stephen on 2 August, probably warranted combined musical forces so that the celebration might be enhanced and ever grander.

The Order of Santo Stefano and Music

The Order of Santo Stefano— like the Florentine court— was a political entity. Its foundation in 1561 enabled Duke Cosimo I to create a patriciate class of his own design affirming his leadership of a sovereign court; the military directive was intended to allow the duke to fortify his economic objectives while forging relationships with other courts,

while the ecclesiastical branch balanced the combat component and the civic facet with a devotional anchor that conciliated the papacy.

Florence, like other courts with interests in the Mediterranean, perceived Muslim presence at sea as a threat to merchandise and ports. The ships sailing under the flag of the Order were a military and political presence for hire, which Cosimo used to fortify his relationship with other European powers, as well as with his own subjects, and with Pius IV, whose ascendancy to the papacy was aided by Cosimo's coffers and political support.⁹ In an article concerning the history of Florentine naval forces, Marco Gemignani remarks that Cosimo was well aware that the creation of a chivalric order with a strong religious component would be viewed favorably by a papacy eager to engage the upper classes in the battle for Catholicism: "[this] coincided with Cosimo's firm belief that religious stability would support the status quo in the states and would serve to maintain the power of the dominant classes."¹⁰ The Order's church in Pisa and the convent of La Concezione each provided religious permanence in their respective city and each derived its members from the patriciate in support of Cosimo's premise.

The conventual church of the Cavalieri in Pisa was an important center of civic life for both the harbor city and the larger Tuscan region. The civic pageantry displayed by the *cavalieri* centered on the Order as a military unit—their church was lined with the flags of defeated Turkish ships and their protection was sought for the fortification of the

⁹ Marco Gemignani, "The Navies of the Medici: The Florentine Navy and the Navy of the Sacred Military Order of Saint Stephen, 1547-1648," in *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Warfare in history, eds., John B. Hattendorf and Richard W. Unger (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Rochester, NY, 2003), 169-85.

¹⁰ Ibid., 173.

port, while their religious activism was rooted in the grand celebration of holy days and in supporting the community through good works.

Cosimo I commissioned designer Giorgio Vasari soon after papal approval was granted in 1562 to construct the plans for the new church— one of a string of projects that included the ducal family’s personal rooms, court structures and La Concezione. Since the church was initially intended to be the seat of the Grand Master, the plans were quite grand with a hefty main altar and a large choir loft; the latter included space for one organ, and a musicians’ room that was ornamented in gold and other embellishments, including the likeness of both Saint Stephen and Cosimo I in matching marble.¹¹ Two choirs on either side of the main altar were built in order to accommodate performance in the popular concerted style.¹² While the plans were completed, the actual building was a much simpler layout as seen in a second design found in Rome that holds that the church was not to be the seat of the Grand Master, but rather that of the Prior of the Order.¹³ It appears that Cosimo wished to simplify the church’s design for political, religious and financial reasons.

¹¹ Franco Paliaga, “L’architettura del Principe, ‘Dux e Più s’: i ‘suntuosi progetti di Giorgio Vasari per la chiesa dell’Ordine dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano in Pisa,” in *The Plume and the Palette*, eds. Pamela Berger, Jeffery Howe, and Susan A. Michalczyk (New York; Washington DC; Bern; Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Brussels; Vienna; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001), 129-58.

Dua disegni depoggioli di mischio dove va l'organo uno et l'altro dove canteranno li musici; il disegno dell'ornamento dell'organo et tutte le modanature che vi vanno et la cura fino che sia finito di legname et messo d'oro con l'altro disegno del padiglione di legnio che va sopra il poggiole della musica. Il disegno della sedia del Gran Maestro et le sue modanature et al cura del farlo finire che sia cosa degna di sì gra Duca et l'ordine delle scale et Coro per i S[igno]ri Cavalieri.

Quote stems from Pietro M. Lonardo, “Lettere inedite di Georgio Vasari,” in *Studi Storici* 6 (1897): 261, doc VI.

¹² Stefano Barandoni and Paola Raffaelli, *L'archivio musicale della chiesa conventuale dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano di Pisa: storia e catalogo*, Studi musicali toscani, iii (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1994), 4.

¹³ Paliaga, “L’architettura del Principe,” 143.

The music of the Order can be divided into two categories: that which was religious—serving the needs of their ecclesiastical mission, and that which was secular—music for civic or military displays used to heighten the symbolic nature of an event; the two categories, however, were by no means mutually exclusive. In the only study of the music of the Order, Stefano Barandoni and Paola Raffaelli provide a brief history of the chapel, lists of chapel masters and performers, pieces that were composed for ritual and civic occasions and descriptions of the manuscripts and prints known to have belonged to the conventual church. The discussion that follows is largely based on their examination of the archives of the Order.¹⁴

Dismissing the original grand plans for the church, Cosimo focused on creating a sacred space in tune with the principles of the Catholic Reformation; it was to be neither “worldly nor regal.” He had a special affinity for the organ, which he felt was a necessary component contributing to the *spettacolo sacro*; the organ should be played in such a way that it encouraged intense religious sentiments in those who heard it.¹⁵ If the sound of the organ adhered to the spirit of reform, it is likely that the singers of the chapel, that is the *cavalieri sacerdoti*, probably sang in a similarly reformed style that emphasized the

¹⁴ Barandoni and Raffaelli. *L'archivio musicale*.

¹⁵ Paliaga, “L’architettura del Principe,” 143.

L’insistenza con la quale Cosimo respinse sistematicamente ogni proposta di ornare l’edificio con manufatti sontuosi, indica che l’intera pianificazione e programma decorativo fu contrassegnato da una strategia fondata sulla severità e sul rigore dei costumi, in sintonia con una etica strettamente connessa ai principi controriformisti. ... Lo spazio dell’architettura era stato concepito quale occasione per l’attuazione dello spettacolo sacro, non certo per quello mondano e regale. Non è perciò un caso che l’interesse maggiore riservato dal Granduca agli arredi della chiesa fosse rivolto alla costruzione dell’imponente organo. Alla musica era destinato il compito di tradurre le necessità liturgiche ed è noto quanto il suono dello strumento svolgesse una funzione determinante nel creare un clima di intensa religiosità all’interno degli edifici monastici, in principal modo quelli di natura controriformata.

See also Chapter One.

chants of the Roman Breviary. The earliest recorded musical activity was in 1569, eight years after the pope approved the foundation of the Order; a group referred to as the *sacerdoti cappellani* and *cantori* began preparing music for the consecration of the conventual church.¹⁶

Instrument maker Onofrio Zeffirini da Cortona built the first organ in 1571, which became the foundation of the first *cappella musicale* comprised of organist Giulio Gigli and three singers. A series of chapel masters commenced, some for only a few years; others, like Jacopo Piffari (1584-1608), Antonio Brunelli (1613-1630), Antonio Navarrini (1648-1670), Giovanni Lorenzo Cattani (1670-1713), Giovan Battista Gieri (1719-1749), Antonio Felice Renzini (1749-1784), Filippo Maria Gherardeschi (1785-1808) and Stefano Romani (1818-1850), held their posts for considerable tenures. The chapel closed down in 1808 with the suppression of the Order; it was reinstated in 1815 only to be closed finally in 1859.¹⁷

The Medici Dukes, perhaps as part of their role as Grand Masters, had an interest in musical appointments for the Order. Few records indicate that they were involved in every musical decision, but at least in 1610, it is known that Cosimo II personally appointed the priest Ippolito Favilli as chapel master of the Church of the Cavalieri; it is unclear if Favilli was already in the service of the Order and this was a promotion or

¹⁶ Barandoni and Raffaelli, *L'archivio musicale*, 5-6.

¹⁷ 1808 was also the year that La Concezione was finally closed by the Napoleonic suppression.

whether this was a new position, although he was to retain his status as a cantor in Pistoia, implying that he was new to the chapel.¹⁸

In addition to the Zeffirini organ, a second, smaller organ was built in 1618 by Cosimo Ravani to accompany the singing of the Hours, and a third organ built (or commissioned) by Cavaliere Azzolino Bernardino della Ciaia was a large four-manual instrument “in cornu Evangelii.” Over the years, due to financial and personnel reasons, the size of chapel fluctuated; however, the hired musical forces usually ranged between six and nine singers plus two to five instrumentalists. The latter always included the organist and usually a trombonist; other instrumentalists on the payroll included violin, therobo, cembalo and violone.

In order to accommodate their musical needs, specifically their desire for polyphony, the Order founded a school of music. Differing from what Barandoni and Raffaelli call the ancient *scholae cantorum*, this school was founded for the purpose of training salaried professionals. The *maestro* of this school was responsible for composing parts for the musicians, conducting rehearsals and performances, teaching the younger students and adding *vari strumenti* as appropriate and available. The authors do not indicate when the school began; however, the Pisan archives record that a *scuola di musica* was maintained by the Order in 1646.¹⁹ The school may also have trained musicians who were destined to work for La Concezione. In addition to any hired

¹⁸ ASF MP 302, f.67, Documentary Sources for the Arts and Humanities. The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID #12720.

¹⁹ ASPi 2333, Filze Staordinaria, affari No. 1132- Musia della Chiesa, 1646.
6. Scuola di musica, contrapunto e strumento.

personnel of the Order who worked at the convent, at least one composer was actually a *cavaliere*, rather than a hired hand. In his court diary, Cesare Tinghi reports a performance of the *Ballo delle Zigane* for the court composed by “Cavaliere Ferdinando Saracinelli da Orvieto” who served as an advisor to Duke Cosimo II and as grand chancellor in the Order of Santo Stefano.²⁰

Saracinelli was probably a rare instance of an aristocratic non-professional composer: most of the musicians of the Order were not *cavalieri* but rather of the servant class. Additionally, there were clerics of the Order who were musically trained so that they might carry out the Mass and the Daily Offices; Saracinelli may have been a well-educated and musically-trained cleric. The Order’s statutes state that members of the religious division of the Order were required to be not only of noble birth and appropriate breeding, but also of a certain education and skill level.

For the Ordination of Chaplains of the Order, or priests obedient to the Church and of the Provisions that they held to do: ...Lastly, [the Chaplain] has to be of acceptable appearance, and not deformed in body, but free and healthy, and appropriately educated, of such a type that at least he understands the Latin language, and sings plainchant (*canto fermo*) well, be familiar with singing in the choir, and has a good singing voice, in such a way that the Church might be able to make use of him; and to all of this the Prior of the Church will have to attest for the Council.²¹

²⁰ 24 February 1615. Angelo Solerti, *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla Corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637* (First published in Florence in 1905; New York: B. Blom, 1968).

²¹ Ordine de’ Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, *Statviti, Capitoli, Et Constitvitioni, dell’Ordine de’ Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, Fondato et dotato dall’Illust[issimo] Et Eccell[enza] S[ignor] Cosimo Medici, Duca II di Diorenza, e di Siena, Riformati dal Sereniss[imo] Don Ferdinando Medici, Terzo Gran Duca di Toscana et Gran Maestro di detto Ordine. Et approvati, et publicati nel Capitolo generale di detto Ordine, l’Anno MDXC. Con le facultà, indulti, et privilegi concessi dalla Santità di Papa Pio III et da N[ostro] S[ignor] Sisto Papa V et dal suddetto fondatore. Con la Tavola copiosissima delle materie, e Capitoli. In Fiorenza, Nella Stamperia di Filippo Giunti. MCXCV. Con Licenza, et Privilegio Tassato in Quattro Giulii sciolto. HRC CR 5535 S6 A3 1595 [The Medici Collection].*

Capitolo 5: Del Ricevimento de’ Cavalieri Cappellani, o sacerdoti di obbedienza della Chiesa, et delle Provanze, che sono tenuti fare, p.54.

These requirements, specifically directed at the religious personnel of the Order, closely match the expectations dictated by the Council of Trent for priests and were thus in keeping with Cosimo's intention to implement monastic reform.²² The explicit mention of *canto fermo* implies that Cosimo and the Order championed traditional, conservative plainchant over polyphony, as would have been approved by the reformers. It is not clear if the priest performed only the chants or whether they practiced polyphony; had they done so, the priests would not have faced the same criticism as female monastics for performing polyphony during services. The practice was not seen as a force likely to corrupt their nature; rather, it was considered more of a possible distraction. The Order's archives indicate that in the early seventeenth century (and presumably during the sixteenth century as well) there was an emphasis placed on the use of Gregorian chant for the Mass and the Hours, leaving the polyphonic and concerted styles for Sundays and feast days as was customary elsewhere. At all other times, the hired musicians performed the more complicated polyphony.²³ The music of the Order is documented in two distinct repertoires, first, the manuscripts belonging to the chapel which are largely concerned with chants, and secondly, the books of printed liturgical music that may have been used by both the trained musicians of the music school and the conventual priests. These two sources would have contained the music for everyday obligations as well as the rituals of the Order and the music for special occasions.

Ultimamente deve essere di ragionevole presenza, e di corpo non istorpiato, ma libero, e sano, e di conveniente letteratura, e canto, di sorte che almeno intenda la lingua Latina, e canti bene di canto fermo, sia pratico del coro, et habbi buono organo di voce, di modo che la Chiesa possa servirsene, et di tutto debba fare fede il Priore della Chiesa al Consiglio.

²² See Chapter One.

²³ Barandoni and Raffaelli, *L'archivio musicale*, 12.

Three such special occasions merit attention in Barandoni and Raffaelli's brief history. The first and second occurred together; during Lent, only the solo organ was to be permitted— full polyphony returned during Holy Week, as was customary in other churches. The third occasion was both a sacred experience and a secular event; the feast for *Corpus Domini*. With the support of the grand ducal court, it included a grand procession with music provided by the combined choirs of the singing priests and the hired musicians. Many motets for the Eucharist connected to this annual feast are extant; most were either composed by musicians of the Order or commission by cavalieri or the Grand Master himself.²⁴ These polyphonic works appear to have been the centerpiece of the Easter celebrations at the church of the Order.

The exact nature of the relationship between the musical chapel of the Order of Santo Stefano and their convent of La Concezione is unclear; however, it seems likely that when the convent had need for musicians to perform religious music, they would turn to the resources of the Order. Performers, composers and teachers who were trained by the Order's school of music would have been the perfect employees for the convent: the singers and instrumentalists had already been vetted by the Medici court as upstanding citizens with sufficient musical aptitude and they were approved to work for the conventual church, so their style of performance, be it the Palestrina/Ruffo homophony, the new monodic style of the early seventeenth century or the Roman

²⁴ Barandoni and Raffaelli, *L'archivio musicale*, 12; an analysis of the motet repertory can be found in discussion and catalogue that makes up most of this volume.

concerted style of the papal chapel, would have been fitting for the convent of patrician daughters.

Outside Musical Influences at La Concezione

As a result of the Council of Trent and similar reform agendas, music in convents was supposed to be highly regulated by local authorities— both the “secular arm” and the ecclesiastical authority of the archbishop. Chapter Four will further discuss the music of La Concezione as a reaction to, and interpretation of, Tridentine reforms. The convent created a culture in which monophony was strictly adhered to as part of the public image of the convent as the ideal reformed monastic institution— a counter-example to recent research that suggests that convents, particularly wealthy institutions, balked at reforms that restricted the music to which they had become accustomed. The recitation of plainchant by the choir of La Concezione created a sense of community among the women bound by a musical tradition that intentionally followed the reforms sweeping across Catholic Europe; this perhaps perpetuated an air of moral superiority that the convent claimed as the elite institution of the court.

The Order of Santo Stefano and the Medici court provided musical influence in what may have been seen as a compromise— outside musicians could be hired for polyphony during Masses and rituals as long as the sisters did not sully themselves with the act in public. Regular payments were made for a variety of musical activities; outside musicians are listed as those paid for *messe cantate*, *musici di vari instrumenti*, teachers, conductors, and repairmen. Two types of account books provide information on

payments made to musicians: the *Libri Giornali* and the *Debitori e Creditori*. Even with two different sets of record keeping, some years have no extant information. Most of the first quarter of the seventeenth century is missing from both accounts, leaving only suppositions as to the musical activities of those vital years.

One of the earliest purchases by the convent was an organ. The payment was made in 1592 to “Buonaventura our Cleric,” an administrative position in the Order that was charged with many procurement tasks.²⁵ The ultimate location of the instrument was not recorded and therefore remains unknown— such knowledge would be a significant bit of information because its location would determine who had access to play it. A second organ was purchased in 1604 from a local organ teacher; perhaps one was located in the exterior chapel and the other inside the chapel within the cloistered space.²⁶ This would have made it not only safer and in accordance with Tridentine reforms, but if the sisters were using the organ for *alternatim* practice, it would have been necessary to have the organist close to the singers to coordinate the exchanges.

The convent hired a series of organists both to play during services and to teach lessons. A payment to such an individual was made roughly once a month, although occasionally there are additional payments and there are some months during which no teacher is paid, particularly in the months preceding the introduction of a new teacher. Presumably, the former moved, died or was no longer available and a new arrangement

²⁵ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.10r.

4 Marzo 1592: A spese generale [per] portatura di uno organo [lire] una 6.8 p[aga]to buonaventura n[ost]ro Cherico.

²⁶ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.188v.

30 Ottobre 1604: A spese di sagr[est]ia /-cingranta di [lire] 7 [per] comperà di uno organo da m[ae]str[o] franc[esc]o Palmieri ch' /-25 sotto q[ue]sto di et il resto avanti sotto più incerto di p[aga]to Cont[an]ti.

had to be made, probably with the assistance of the Order and the court. In 1594, two years after the convent opened, Signor Giulio was hired specifically to teach Suora Virginia; he continued to be on salary until 1595, even after her name no longer appears in the entries.²⁷ Possibly, this was the same organist concurrently employed by the Order named Giulio Gigli.²⁸ By 1598, Signor Giovanni Baptista Soldato the organist is on the payroll; no specific pupil is mentioned only that he teaches *i tasti* or “the keys;” perhaps he taught not just organ but other keyboard instruments such as a spinet that account records indicate was purchased and may have been made available; his name appears in the account records until 1601.²⁹ Alberigo Malvezzi taught at least two women beginning in 1604; his tenure is unclear because the primary account book closes that year and the next one begins in thirty-two years.³⁰ This is a regrettable fact because Alberigo was also in the service of the Duke as the organist at the Duomo and he was the brother of Cristofano Malvezzi, the Medici composer, organist, singer, teacher of Medici princesses and Jacopo Peri and chapel master of the Duomo and at the Baptistery.

²⁷ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.57v.

26 gen 1594: A spese di sonatore /-dua a S[ignor] Giul[ian]o organista [per] insengnare a S[uor] Verg[ini]a n[ostr]a Monacha p[aga]to Conto.

²⁸ Barandoni and Raffaelli, *L'archivio musicale*, 6.

²⁹ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.143r.

18 Settembre 1598: A spese di sagr[esti]a /-uno a. S[ignor] Gio[vanni] b[atist]a organista, [per] inseg[na]re di tasti .

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.114r.

13 Luglio 1601: A spese di sagr[esti]a [lire] 3.10 a S[ignor] Gio[vanni] Batista del soldato Org[anis]ta [per] aliore vassete j buono acordo.

³⁰ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.188l.

23 Ottobre 1604: A spese di sagr[esti]a /-dua y a m[aest]re Alberigo Malaezzi [Maluessi] [per] avere insegnato sonare di Tasti a 2 Mon[ach]e un Mese p[aga]to Cont[an]ti.

Frank D'Accone: 'Malvezzi, Alberigo', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 23 March 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu>>

The Grove article notes his employment at San Lorenzo and the Duomo and his employment as a musician of the Grand Duke but does not mention his employment with the convent.

When the account books are again available, Maestro Francesco Palmieri, an organist of many talents, was paid as early as 1628 and continued to be on the payroll until 1634.³¹ One account book notes payments to Maestro Agustino Guasconi the organist in 1635; when the primary account book begins in 1637 Guasconi is regularly listed as a salaried employee until 1644.³² He is replaced by Maestro Vincentio Cormani da Rimini, an organist whose salary is based on teaching unnamed daughters a few times in 1645 and who also spent an extensive period retuning the organ with an assistant.³³

Few documents detail how a particular musician came to be employed but in the case of one organist, there is a letter asking permission for him to teach.³⁴ In it, Abbess Umiliana Lenzi addresses the superiors of the Order of Santo Stefano seeking permission for Giovanni Baptista Soldato the organist “to teach keyboard to two of his pupils” at the grates. She requests the license for the enhancement of the “divine cult” before the musician leaves for Santa Maria Impruneta, a church just south of Florence.³⁵ The request

³¹ Pezzo 36, Il Debitori e Creditori dal 1628 al 1674, f.74v.

26 Ottobre 1634: /-1.3 ... pag[a]ti a M[aest]ro Franc[esc]o Palmieri ...

³² Pezzo 36, Il Debitori e Creditori dal 1628 al 1674, f.81r.

16 Ottobre 1635: ... /-1.3 ... pag[a]ti a M[aest]ro Agostino Guasconi Org[anis]to ...

Pezzo 33 Libro Giornale, 1637-1654, f.67r.

31 Ottobre 1644: A Spese Chiesa /-sei di m.ta 35.16.8 [ch] [y or 3] 10 pag[a]te a M[aestr] Agostino Guasconi Organista [per] il sal[a]rio di un ano compito g.eo di p'nte e il resto in oro è Greco.

³³ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 33 Libro Giornale, 1637-1654, f.81r.

22 Febbraio 1645: A spese di Chiesa /-venti di m.ta [lire] pag[a]ti a M[aest]ro Vincentio Cormanida Rimini Organista [per] aver' raccordato l'Organo avendo cavat è rassettato tutte le Canne che [scudi] di 7 in uno strumento di tasti usato, sendo stato a lavorare giorni 16 nel qual temp[o] seli sono fatt' le spese [e]al suo Garz[o]ne.

³⁴ Notably, it is from the earliest years of the convent's operation

³⁵ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 59, Lettere e Ordini, filza Lettere diver[s]e- 1592-1692, Book 10, Letter di S[uor] Umiliana Lenzi nostra [per] Abb[adess]a, Ano 1592-1620.

3 Ag[ust]o 1600: Con grand[issi]ma istanzia vengo a pregar V[enerabile] S[antissima] M[agnifico] J[esu] et R[eale] ch' mi voglia concedere i g'ra et [per] il culto divino, lic[enz]a a S[ignor] Gio[vanni] B[atist]a del soldato organista ch possa venirci a le grate a insegnare di tasti a.2 sue scolare: [per] un poco di tempo che detto sta i fir[en]za ch q[uest]o Settembre deve andare a S[an]ta M[ari]a Impruneta [per] amor' di Jesu nò

was granted the same month and in a separate document and a payment is made to the organist at the end of the month.³⁶ The letter is dated August 1600, although Giovanni had been teaching at La Concezione since 1598; while the names of the students are not listed, it is implied that these were young students, perhaps *educande*, as they are not called novices, or sisters but “scolare” (the singular instance of this term).

A special license was required in order to avoid the harsh penalties of breaking *clausura*; usually, this would have been addressed to the archbishop as the local official in charge of maintaining *clausura* and its exceptions; however, La Concezione wrote to the administrators of the Order instead, again reinforcing the supremacy of the Order in all matters related to the convent. This passage is the only document uncovered that indicates where lessons took place; presumably, as discussed above, the location of the organ would be paramount. However, this request specified “the grates” as the setting for the lessons. This could indicate use of the double chapel where the teacher could play the organ in the main church and the sister the one in the inner chapel, although the structure of the building was designed to discourage communication and visual contact. Most likely, the passage indicates that the lessons were to take place in the parlor with its

mi disdica ch' ci pare haverne necessita et col'fine li preghiamo dal S[antissima] dio ogni contento et humilm'ete gli domandiao la sua S[antissim]a bened[i]re del n[ost]ro Mon[aster]o d[e]lla S[antissim]a Conce[zio]ne ... (different hand): Concedesi [-] [tutt]o g.[n]o mese [-] Ag[ust]o 1600. (her handwritten post script): Desidero ch' V[enerabile] S[antissima] mi conceda lic[enz]a ch m.er Ba[r]. t[utt]o Naroni, n[ost]ro Conf[esse]ro possa ertrar' dr'eto a vedere T.a Muraglia ch noi facciamo [per] l'inferme.

³⁶ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.135v.

29 Ag[ust]o 1600: A spese di sagr[esti]a /-uno [lire] 3. S[ignor].Gio[vanni] Batista del Soldato [per] havere insegnadto sonare di tasti.

double grate structure and space large enough for an organ, or a smaller, more portable keyboard instrument.³⁷

Occasionally, an organist was hired to tune the instrument(s); this may have been additional income for the house instructor or a specialist in tuning.³⁸ In 1628, Maestro Francesco Palmieri the organist is paid to tune the organ; most likely, it was the organ that he sold to the convent in 1604.³⁹ In the late seventeenth century, Maestro Niccolo Giovannini the organist is paid twice to adjust the bellows and re-tune an unspecified organ but nothing indicates that he either taught or performed for the convent.⁴⁰

Many organists were paid for their performing services in addition to their teaching responsibilities. Performances may have been regular Mass services, or more likely, when the musician was specifically named, then the occasion was more particular, such as an investiture or profession ceremony. In a reference from 1594, the above-mentioned Giuliano is not referred to as *organista*, but *sonatore*.⁴¹ Giuliano is the only musician named in the early years, so it is likely the same person. The entry does not

³⁷ Chapter 4 will further examine how and where lessons were taught.

³⁸ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 34, Libro Giornale 1654-1683, f.66r.

Ult[imo] Ottobre 1659: A spese gener[a]li ... a l'organista [per] l'accordat[ur]a dell'organo...

³⁹ There was an organ maker named Francesco who apparently worked for the Medici in 1613, no last name or other identifying note is given. ASF MP 1350, f.43, 1613. Documentary Sources for the Arts and Humanities. The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID #1234.

⁴⁰ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 36, Il Debitori e Creditori dal 1628 al 1674, f.13v.

Ult[imo] Gen 1628: ... [lire] 10 a M[aest]ro franc[esc]o Palmieri Organista [per] accordatura dell'organo ...

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 36, Il Debitori e Creditori dal 1628 al 1674, f.278v.

Ult[imo] Lug 1664: I.to /-ydua di M.ta [lire] 1-- che [lire] 10 pag[a]ti a Niccolo Giovannini Organista [per] Rasset.ra de Mantici et Accord.ra dell'Organo ...

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 36, Il Debitori e Creditori dal 1628 al 1674, f.320v.

Ult[imo] Ag[ust]o 1671: sette ... pag[a]ti a M[aest]ro Nicoolo Giovannini Organista [per] aver ri[p]ulito e Raccordato l'Organo di n[ostr]a Chiesa e ci sono comprese[r] [lire] otto spese in un Mantice ...

⁴¹ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.[50].

11 Settembre 1594: A spese soprad[i]ca di sagra[est]i]a ciò d[e]l Vestimento /-uno a S[ignor] Giul[ia]no sonatore.

specify what instrument he plays for the investiture, but on another occasion, he is called, and paid, as an organist for playing with other instruments.⁴² Perhaps he was paid for directing the band of musicians in addition to, or instead of, his organist duties. Payments to musicians who were not organists appear regularly; most often they were paid for singing or playing “instrumenti.” These musicians were not named in the account books, and their fees were paid through the cleric; at other times, the name is given with no designated job, such as Signor Constantino Arrighi, *musico*; he could have been an organist or even a castrato.⁴³

Musicians were occasionally hired for grand events at the convent that included art, music and civic engagement. In 1685, a large and significant artwork representing the Holy Conception of Mary was completed; the artisans, numbering at least six, were paid upwards of five thousand pieces of gold. In addition, music was performed in honor of the Conception, likely for the unveiling of the art. The music was at the bequest of the superiors of the Order and Cavaliere Falconetti who contributed money towards the performance; he was the brother of the professed Suora Maria Verginia.⁴⁴ In a similar act

⁴² ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.[55]v.

10 Dicembre 1594: A spese dc'e [lire] dodici. S. Giul[ia]no organista [per] la musica dla Concezione et strumenti di organo et al [vari?] strumenti p[aga]to d[i]co Contati.

⁴³ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.150r

8 Dicembre 1601: A spese d[i]ce [sagr[esti]a, festa della S[antissim]a Concezione] /-sette a S[ignor] Constantino Arrighi musico p[aga]to Cont[an]ti.

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.14r.

18 Aprile 1593: A spese di sagr[esti]a [lire] venti [soldi] 10.8 al preti et Cher.si ch' ban'o celebrato leggendo et Cantado in 7 S[ignor] giovni et ban'o Ca[n]tato boggi q[uest]o Dj di pasqual la Mesa p[aga]to buonavent'na di m[aestr]o Iacopo n[ostr]o Cherico contati.

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.23r.

12 Settembre 1593: A spese di sagr[esti]a /-otto [lire] 3.10 [per] la musica con vari strumenti [per] la festa d[e]l vest[imen]to p[aga]to bonavetn[tur]a di M[aest]ro Jacopo d' Condotti n[ostr]o Cherico.

⁴⁴ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 35, Libro Giornale 1683 al 1694, f.22r.

of co-operation, in 1689 a new marble altar was constructed to hold saintly relics. There was to be a public revealing of the *veneration*, including a presentation by the Grand Duke to the Prior of Santo Stefano and a celebration of the Mass, probably with polyphony, two Vesper services with similar music, and a *Te Deum*.⁴⁵

The musical culture of the Medici court and the Order of Santo Stefano were important factors in shaping the musical influences on La Concezione, a community of cloistered female religious who were largely dependent on others for materials and personnel that were not already part of the convent. The robust musical traditions of the court, local churches and the Order fostered the culture through which the convent could enjoy similar musical luxuries, albeit in a feminized, reformed manner appropriate to their position in Florentine society.

2 Settembre 1685: A spese di Chiesa /-507 ... [per] Fattura del'Quadro grande della Santissima Conce[zio]ne posta nella facciata di n[ost]ra Chiesa, pagati a diversi Manifattori ... Sig[no]re Ant[oni]o Granchi Lucchese Pittore, per detta Opera compuesori ... del Telaio; M[aestr]o Gius[epp]e Stecchi [per] Intagliatura ... della Cornice, compresoci ... Carbell[i]ni e Legatura; M[aestr]o Gius[epp]e Lensi Indovatore [per] di tutto l'ornamento di detto Quadro; M[aestr]o Franc[esc]o M[ari]a Buonaiuti [b]atti loro [per] Valsuta di n.o 5000 pezzi d'oro servito [per] d[et]ta Opera; M[aestr]o Pier Maria Magni Legnaiolo [per] Palchi e Sopra Palchi [per] accomadatura di detto Quadro; Al Magniano [per] più ferri Aquti Arpioni e suo Lavoro. Per la Musica fatta ad'onore della S[antissim]a Concetione compita t[u]ta d[et]ta Opera quale si e fatta d'ordine de noi Superiori a conto della Credita venuta al N[ost]ro Mona[ster]o del Sig[nor] Cavaliere Falconetti mediante la persona di S[uor] M[ari]a Vergina sua sorella e n[ost]ra Mon[ac]a velata, de quali sebe puesi [scudi] di 420 portorono d[et]ti cont[an]i in più Volte.

⁴⁵ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 35, Libro Giornale 1683 al 1694, f.64r.

Ult[imo] Mag 1689: A spese di Chiesa /-895 ... aver Fab[brica] di nuovo l'Altar Mag[gi]ore tutto di marmi nella nostra Chiesa [per] depositore in esso il Corpo del Glorioso M[agnifico] S[erenissima] Felicissimo. Compresso tutte l'altre spese fatte [per] tal effetto nella Prima esposizione alla pubblica Venerazione essendo stati Regalati alla nostra Chiesa, dal Ser[enissimo] Gran Duca tutti i marmi di d[et]to Altare et il S[an]to Corpo l'a Donato al Mona[ster]o il nostro Superiore presente l'Ill[ustrissi]mo e Rev[erend]o Mons[ignor] Francesco M[ari]a Sergrifi Priore della Chiesa de Cav[alie]re di Santo Stefano in Pisa pagati a diversi manifattori come apparisce nel appie partite e si puo vedere [per] loro ricevute contanti. (list of employed artisans) ... M[aestr]o Girolamo: Zazzerini Pittore [per] la Pittura dreto al Ciborio, e M[aestr]o Pier Ant[onio] Galletti Imbiancat. ... [per] la Messa Cantata di musica e due Vespri similmente di musica Te Deum, et il Palco.

It is regrettable that the documentation for most of the first quarter of the seventeenth century is no longer extant; these crucial years in Florentine musical development might have led to a more complete understanding of La Concezione's relationship with the musicians of the court and the Order. The limited information that is available indicates that performers employed by the court and local churches taught students in the convent and the hired musicians of the Order performed at La Concezione both for special occasions and for routine services. A more thorough examination of the musical practices of the convent will be undertaken in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Music and Community at La Concezione

The musical culture of La Concezione differed significantly from the known traditions of contemporary institutions of comparable wealth and Rule. While affluent convents in Milan, Bologna, Siena and Rome were known for their star performers, extensive polyphony in their chapels and parlors, even public concerts—the sisters of La Concezione maintained a steadfast public tradition of monophony. Polyphonic contributions were limited to outside musicians hired to be the public face of convent music.

Several documents support this thesis, one that is quite different from our current understanding of the musical undertakings of wealthy, urban early-modern convents (even in Florence itself). Most significantly, the Tridentine reforms, Benedictine Rule, and more local statutes either discouraged the public performance of polyphony or outright banned the practice in female institutions. Conforming to the rigid established rules, both the Constitution of the convent and Charter from the Order of Santo Stefano go to extensive lengths to enforce the supremacy of monophony in both liturgical and non-liturgical settings; account records show many payments for outside musicians to perform lavish polyphony with voices and instruments but relatively few transactions for teachers and instruments for the sisters; and no evidence has been found proving ownership or possession of music part books or manuscripts. It is of course possible that

the music has simply been lost to time and material dispersion— however, I find it more likely that no evidence exists because La Concezione did not have a polyphonic tradition as part of its public institutional identity. By way of contrast, the Florentine sister institution of Le Murate boasts strong proof of a polyphonic tradition through letters and official records if not through physical remnants, and the sisters of the Dominican convent of La Crocetta, while Harness' research suggests that they hired most of their polyphonic performers, likely engaged in polyphonic music that was influenced by composers and performers known to the sisters and their patrons.¹ This would seem to indicate that local and regional prohibitions alone were not enough to discourage the elaborate practices of figured music.

Early modern Italian courts, both religious and secular, considered music one of the prime means through which to display wealth and power. Music was used in nearly all sacred feasts as well as civic events, during social activities such as weddings and funerals, and in the theater where the budding genre of opera flaunted political messages through song; on a smaller scale, music became increasingly popular for the purposes of

¹ Information on Le Murate's musical heritage has not been studied in depth, although Kate Lowe reports that music did indeed play an important role in the daily life of the convent. Lowe, K. J. P. *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 266-81. In a personal communication, Lowe indicated that she found no information on music that was not relayed in the book (22 November 2005). For the musical culture of La Crocetta, see Chapters 7 and 8 of Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women's Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Harness notes that outside musicians were hired in greater numbers late in the sixteenth century through the 1630s, particularly during the time years when the Medici women were inhabitants or frequent visitors. She also suggests that the sisters may have performed the polyphonic music written by outside composers and that they performed plays with banned costumes, jewels and other accessories (290-94).

entertainment and personal devotion.² Given the vast opportunities for using music for social, liturgical and economic enhancement, why would the community of La Concezione choose to revert to the medieval conventions of plainchant? This decision would have been brought about through the impetus of the Order of Santo Stefano and the Medici court but would have required the support of the prominent families that made up the community. The compliance of the sisters was also necessary because if they had not agreed to uphold the tradition of plainchant as part of the convent's status as a superior institution, it would have been nearly impossible to contain the use of polyphony—as the research of several musicologists in the past few years has made evident.

It is paradoxical then, that at a time when convents, particularly large or wealthy ones, sought to elevate their standing through elaborate musical performances, La Concezione—the most elite convent of Florence—chose to reinforce its preeminence through the simplest and most humble of musical practices. La Concezione sought to distinguish itself from other monastic houses as a higher and more worthy institution; part of the plan to accomplish this was to rise above the 'rule breakers' to be 'rule exemplifiers.'

² Tim Carter, *Music, Patronage and Printing in Late Renaissance Florence* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000); Anthony Cummings and Jessie Ann Owens, eds. *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Studies in Honor of Lewis Lockwood* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997); Fabrizio Della Seta and Franco Piperno, eds. *In cantu et in sermone: For Nino Pirrotta on his 80th Birthday* (Italy: Leo Olschki 1989); Iain Fenlon, *Music and Culture in Late Renaissance Italy* (New York: Oxford University 2002); Frederick Hammond, *Music and Spectacle in Baroque Rome: Barberini Patronage Under Urban VIII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Richard Sherr, *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome and Other Courts* (Aldershot: Ashgate 1999); James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as theatrum mundi* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

Performing chant in the public space would have been a political statement of adherence to reform; more than that, the sisters would have understood the recitation of plainchant as part of their spiritual duty—the practice bound them as a community of devout women whose mission it was to pray for the protection of the court, the Order and the people of Florence. The reputation of the community as one of holy virgins was mirrored in the chaste, unsullied unity of voices singing only ancient words and melodies. Those who were present at the small number of “semi-public” events at the convent’s outer chapel would have appreciated the purity of the angelic chants that could be heard but not seen; this would have been a contrast to the worldly complexity of the polyphony emanating from the musicians seated in public view.

The Medici family—Eleonora, Cosimo I, Ferdinando I and perhaps other rulers -- made the conscious decision to make La Concezione the embodiment of perfect monastic ideals. It was designed to be an institution that all other convents should emulate—its adhesion to rules and regulations would be such that the community would be blameless in the eyes of Florence, the Pope and God. This perfection was a deliberate construct that would be so glowing in its sanctity and holiness that it would favorably reflect the Medici duchy to the rest of Europe. In an era of reform, particularly of liturgical and spiritual matters, plainchant was the key to affirming La Concezione’s devotional superiority.

As a genre, plainchant has not traditionally been a topic of interest to musicologists beyond about 1550. While polyphony became the norm in nearly every liturgical genre during the Renaissance, monophony continued to be performed in churches, monasteries and convents across Catholic Europe. Institutions with few

resources probably relied almost completely on chant, although even communities that could afford music, teachers and instruments continued to perform chant as part of their devotional practices.

Until the 1990s, it was thought wide-scale polyphony was not capable of flourishing in female monastic houses. While some research exists concerning the intended reform of plainchant by the Council of Trent (not only for female religious but also for their male counterparts and for churches), little evidence has been unearthed to indicate that such reforms were effective.³ A full accounting of the changes to plainchant undertaken by the Catholic Church during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, I will discuss plainchant as a means of upholding La Concezione's image as an elite institution and as it created a sense of community within the convent walls.⁴

To say that La Concezione was completely dedicated to plainchant is only a half-truth. It is accurate to state that the public image of the convent depended on strict adherence to the policies that banned polyphonic music performed by the sisters in the chapel or other public areas of the cloister; however, the sisters of La Concezione were permitted *canto figurato*, that is, polyphony, in limited usage as long as it neither broke *clausura*, nor was done in such a way that it could be heard by the public. In perhaps the most important statute about how and where music was permitted and forbidden, the

³ See Chapter 3 for a discussion of La Concezione's adherence to Tridentine reforms and Craig Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55/1 (Spring 2002): 1-37. See also Marica Tacconi, *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria Del Fiore*, Cambridge studies in palaeography and codicology, 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴ See also Chapter 5.

Constitution illuminates its reader concerning the correct time and place for different kinds of musical activities:

We renew obedience to the old Rule, Chapter 12 that states that if there is a need for some sister to learn plainchant (canto fermo) or the figured style, (figurato) or to play an instrument, even the Organ, this is not allowed to happen through the door of the cloister, but only at the grate; and in order to avoid even this, we desire that the Abbesses shall make it so that those who are able to sing plainchant or to play the organ to such a degree that they can teach the others, [be made to] teach; and this being necessary, by our authority they [the abbesses] shall command them [to do so] in virtue of holy obedience, reminding them that by order of the Sacred Congregation of 1620 it is prohibited [for the sisters] to sing polyphony in public, but it is only conceded to them amongst themselves in private.⁵

While this appears at first glance to be a straightforward, simple command, the details of music making were obviously complex and contentious issues. This passage elucidates the Order's position on the musical activities of the convent and serves as a clear indication that the superiors of the Order subscribed neither to the strict prohibition against music performed by religious women, nor to a blanket acceptance of hedonistic polyphony. Several fine points require further examination.

First, even the earliest (and hence, the strictest) Rule accepted the place of polyphony—if cautiously. Singing in both the monophonic and the figured styles was acknowledged, as was playing instruments; this is the only passage that indicates that an instrument other than the organ was permitted, even sanctioned. In sixteenth-century

⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, p.55.

10. Rinnoviamo l'obbedienza de capitoli vecchi al Capitolo 12 che bisognando a alcuna Mon[ac]a imparare Canto fermo o figurato, o suono etiam che di Organo non si possa fare in su la porta della clausura, ma solamente alla grata, e acciò non si abbi auenire anco a questo, vogliamo che le Badesse faccino opera che quelle chi sanno cantare di canto fermo, e sonar l'organo in modo che possino insegnare all'altre insegnino; e bisognando per nostra autorità lo comandino in virtù di santa Obbedienza, ricordando loro che per Decreto della Sac[r]a Cong[regazione] dell'Anno 1620 e proibito il cantare di canto figurato in pubblico, ma solamente e concesso tra di lor privatamente.

Florentine court culture, some instruments would have been considered more acceptable for women to play than others, particularly as part of a performance for public consumption; but since, as would become clear later in the passage, such music was not to be heard by anyone outside the cloister, this passage leaves the door open to the possibility that the sisters played other instruments— perhaps for devotional purposes, as *basso continuo* accompaniment, or even in purely instrumental performances.⁶

Secondly, maintaining clausura continued to be the most important factor and was to be enforced at any expense. A male teacher was not ideal, but should one be required, he was only to go as far as the grates, meaning that he could not come in close contact with the sister-pupil, let alone touch her. Thirdly, the rationale for hiring a teacher was so that he might instruct his pupil to the point of proficiency whereas she might teach others of her community—eliminating the need for the teacher altogether. As seen in Chapter Three, male organists were hired regularly although there are lengths of time where no teacher is employed, perhaps his services were not required at that time. Fourthly, the abbess was charged with ensuring that a girl took lessons only until she was capable of teaching; the abbess then charged the girl under her vow of obedience to teach fellow players and singers. Presumably, this arrangement was meant to curtail the sin of pride that the superiors associated with musical talent. Additionally, this arrangement minimalized the contact that the community had with outsiders—only one girl would take lessons from outsiders so that others could be taught in house.

⁶ Craig Monson, *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 38-47 discusses the types and uses of musical instruments banned and procured by nuns in Bologna.

Finally, the rule reminds the sisters that precedent existed not only in terms of internal tradition, but also in formal pronouncement. In 1620, when the Sacred Congregation put forth their decree, they probably did so because of the plethora of requests submitted for exemptions and the frequent abandonment of the spirit of reform among female monastics.⁷ The document's authors put forth a middle ground between no polyphony and the public display of counterpoint by separating the act of performing a religious duty (the chants of the services) from the act of performing polyphonic music, which, while it could be devotional, was not part of their sacred duty and should therefore not be done in the sacred (public) space of the chapel.

The timing of this decree is important because by 1650 when this section was written, reform efforts were losing their potency; this rule was a re-affirmation of the spirit of reform, if not the actual words of the Council of Trent. Catholic Reformation efforts at reforming music were ambiguously stated in the decrees of the Council of Trent, even if the message of musical reform was clearly understood by most authorities. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the body in charge of regulating monastic procedures and reform, mandated that performing polyphonic music was considered too dangerous a practice to be permitted to the sisters. This was posited in the sixteenth century by Tridentine reformers and reinforced in 1620, but La Concezione interpreted this to mean that polyphonic music was not permitted in public, although in

⁷ Both Monson, *Disembodied Voices* and Robert Kendrick, *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), attest to the numerous requests received by the Sacra Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regulari, most of which were denied.

private, it was conceded.⁸ This arrangement permitted the public record of apposite devotion through chant, thus maintaining the official Medicean position; however, quite intentionally, the configuration left no trace of private polyphonic performance, since that would have been in violation of the Sacred Congregation's rule.

It seems likely that in the early years of the convent, relatively little polyphonic music was performed by the nuns— certainly not any in a public area such as the choir loft or the parlor. This atmosphere of adherence to a strict interpretation of reform measures, whether formal or informal, was in keeping with the image of La Concezione as the model of a reformed convent. In later decades, it would appear that the policy was updated to differentiate between the public reflection of Medicean reform and the private privilege of music proper to the educated, cultured daughters of the elite. The following discussion will evaluate the various passages concerning the use of music at the convent for both everyday activities and special occasions.

Daily Life

Each day at La Concezione was filled with different kinds of music— while rituals provided the most elaborate opportunities to make and enjoy music, the daily activities of life were punctuated with the incidental music of meals, chores, choir rehearsals, and daily lessons. To facilitate the many sanctioned musical endeavors, the

⁸ I believe that the 1620 decree refers to a specific communication between the sisters of La Concezione and the Sacred Congregation, although the archives of the Sacred Congregation are temporarily unavailable.

Constitution provides for several officers to teach, rehearse, perform and coordinate the sisters' musical activities.

The officer most important to music in the convent was the *Corista*, or the Choir Mistress. Appointed by the Abbess, she was charged with ensuring the appropriateness of not only the music sung each day, but the readings and lessons as well. Also under her purview were several deputy officers, indicating that her appointment was probably one of the more prestigious and sought after offices to hold within the convent hierarchy.

The Mother Abbess should therefore among the other Offices elect [to the Office of Choir Mistress] a Sister who is serious in the customs of devotion and is diligent in Spiritual matters, practice, in matters of the Divine Offices, and in Plainchant [canto fermo]; it will be this person's duty to indicate each time the Office that the Choir ought to recite, and to make note of it to the Reader and Singer. It will be her duty to write on a tablet, which shall be attached to the music stand of the choir, who in the choir shall participate in the Office of the Choir, and these shall include the Reader, two Singers, two Antiphoners, and the Readers of the Morning Lessons. Let her take care in appointing these duties, that the Rule says in Chapter 47 that one must not give anything to read or sing to sisters who are not able to fulfill those duties in such a way as to be edifying to those who listen, and the same goes for the lesson in the dining hall in Chapter 38. In Chapter 47 it says that for all those to whom it is assigned to read, sing, or otherwise, they should do it with humility, seriousness, and deference and no one without just cause may recuse herself from doing that which was assigned by the Choir Mistress; even if it would seem to her that she is not worthy, she should still mortify herself and obey.⁹

⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Decimo Nono: Dell'Ufizio della Corista, p.222. ...Deve dunque la M[adre] Bad[ess]a tra l'altre Uf[fi]ci ali eleggere una Mon[ac]a grave di constumi devota e diligente nelle cose Spirituali, pratica, nell'ordinare i Divini Uf[fi]ci, e nel Canto fermo quale si chiami Corista; alla quale apparterra l'ordinare volta per volta l'Uf[fi]cio che si deve recitare in Coro, e farlo noto all'Eddomedaria e Cantore. Sarà suo Uf[fi]cio notare n una tavoletta che si terrà appiccata al Leggio del Coro settimana [per] settimana che a da fare gli Uf[fi]ci del Coro, cioè l'Eddomedaria, due Cantore due Antifonarie, e le Lettore delle Lezzioni Mattutine. Avverta nel distribuire questi Uf[fi]ci che la Reg[ol]a nel Capitolo 47 dice che non si commetta il Cantare o leggere a Mon[ach]e che non sieno atte a tali Uf[fi]ci con edificazione di che sente, e il medesimo dice della lezione di mensa nel Capitolo 38 e 47 dice che a tutti quelli che e imposto il Cantare o leggere, o altra cosa, la faccino con umiltà, con gravità e tremore e nessuna senza giusta causa recusì di fare quel che dalla detta Corista glie imposto, etiam che li paressi non essere atta, ma si mortifichi e obbedisca.

It appears that the importance of abiding by the command of the *Corista* was paramount to the authors of the Constitution. This sister perhaps controlled which pieces of music, both traditional hymns and laude would be heard during the structured time during which the community gathered. She would have needed to be familiar with a wide variety of hymns and laude as well as all of the liturgical music of the Daily Offices, the Mass, convent rituals and the Litanies. Departing from what would have been desirable in many convents, the *Corista* did not need to be a soloist of virtuosic flourishes; rather, she was charged with keeping the choir together and producing a harmonious blend of sounds.

The *Corista* seems to have been responsible for assigning particular sisters to the choir and to specific jobs in the musico-liturgical context of the convent, an office that may have been coveted for the power and influence it ensured. The last phrase of the above excerpt is significant in that even if a sister felt she was not worthy of performing a particular role, she was to do so anyway because it was assigned to her; presumably then, the *Corista* was only to assign roles to sisters who could give proper religious meaning and expressivity to the music. The mandate had the additional benefit of reminding sisters not to be too proud of their prominent roles as singers and readers.

Of the positions overseen by the *Corista* there were readers, singers, antiphoners and although not specifically listed in the description, probably also the *sacrestana*, the officer for the vestry, as she was responsible “to call [the sisters] to the Masses, the Priest [to hear] Confessions, [for] Communion and at all other Canonical Hours.”¹⁰ Although

¹⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Terzodecimo: Dell'Ufizio della Sacrestana, p.208.

the exact meaning is unclear, she was probably responsible for ringing the bells that announced the call to worship.

Singing antiphons and verses in monastic settings was a well-established and honored practice that would have been not only acceptable, but also expected of the sisters' devotional practice.¹¹ The description of the office of the *antifonarie* provides an idea of the flexibility allotted to the manner in which antiphons could be performed.¹²

Of the Antiphoners: Varied is the use by the Religious about [the way] to say Antiphons and Responses in the Choir; some use them by the Choir saying them all together, and another by a soloist; but in the Cathedrals and the Colleges of Priests they use two antiphoners, one from one Choir, another from a different Choir; that is, the one from the right says the first antiphon, the other from the left follows it and things alternate, they say them one and then another until the end. As far as the responsaries are concerned, one responds to all three Lessons, and when there are several Nocturnes, one responds to the first the other to the second and the first responds to the third.¹³

Here, the singing styles of the larger, grander churches seems to be advocated for the sisters; given the constraints of the cloistered space of the sisters however, this may simply indicate a method of alternation throughout the service. This performance practice

4. Ella con le sue Compagne aranno l'obbligo di sonare alle Messe, alla Predica alle Confessioni, e Comunioni e a tutte l'altre ore Canoniche ...

¹¹ Terence Bailey, *Antiphon and psalm in the Ambrosian office* (Ottawa, Canada: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1994); Joseph Dyer, "Monastic Psalmody of the Middle Ages," *Revue bénédictine* 99 (1989): 41–74; Jeffrey G. Kurtzman, "Tones, modes, clefs and pitch in Roman cyclic Magnificats of the 16th century," *Early Music* 22/4 (November 1994): 641–62.

¹² I thank Professor Marco Gozzi for pointing out that the verb *dire* (or *dicere*) could be used instead of *cantare* in reference to the practice of performing plainchant because the text was considered more important than the manner in which it was communicated.

¹³ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Ventesimo secondo: Dell' Antifonarie, p.226. Vario è l'uso delle Religioni circa il dire l'antifone, e Responsorij in Coro; poi che alcune usano che le dica tutto il Coro insieme, e in altre una sola persona; ma nelle Cattedrali e Collegiate usano fare due antifanarij uno da un Coro, e l'altro dall'altro; quello alla destra dice la prima antifona, l'altro alla sinistra la seconda e così scambievolmente ne dicono una per uno sino al fine e quanto a i Responsorij uno risponde a tutte tre le Lezzioni, e quando sono più Notturni, uno risponde alle pri[m]e l'altro alle seconde, e il primo risponde alle terze.

would have required adequate, trained forces capable of coordinating the different sections of the antiphons, responses, lessons and nocturnes mentioned.

Providing the necessary performers, the sisters had specially selected choir leaders, called “Rulers of the Choir” elsewhere whose duties included many different types of music for both everyday services and special feasts.

1. [The Sisters] should appoint cantors that [each] have a good voice, and that know how to sing plainchant (canto fermo) well, and know the Psalm tones, and that also know how to perform the Office and can read well.
2. The two Singers need to be one on the right side, and the other on the left side of the Choir, and when the Office is said by reading, the one on the right ought to begin the first Psalm, the other on the left the second one, and things are to follow this way to the end of the Office. [They should] rise on their feet for every Psalm or Hymn that they intone, as is common practice. Otherwise, there is no purpose to have two singers if only one sings the entire Office.
3. When the Office calls for singing [the entire service] they will intone the Psalms, Hymns, Canticles and Verses, and also the *Benedicamus Domino* from the middle of the Choir.
4. It is their duty to support the Choir and thus they should sing the Psalms clearly with the full pauses in the middle of the verses, without [adding additional bits at the end], and with equal voices (voci pari), and on solemn feast days they should sing more *adagio* [more deliberately].¹⁴

¹⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Ventesimo primo: Delle Cantore, p.225.

1. Si elegghino Cantore che abbino buona voce, e che sappino cantar bene di Canto fermo, e sappino i tuoni, e che anco sappino ordinare l'Ufizio e legghino bene. 2. Devono le due Cantore stare una a lato destro, e l'altra al sinistro del Coro, e quando l'Ufizio si dice leggendo quella che e alla man destra deve incominciare il prim Salmo, l'altra dalla sinistra il secondo, e cosi seguitare vicendevolmente sino al fine dell'Ufizio, levandosi in piedi a ogni salmo, o Inno che le intonano, cosi e l'uso universale; altrimenti in vano si fanno due Cantore mentre una sola sia quella che intuona a tutto l'Ufizio. 3. Quando si dice l' Uffizio cantando andranno ambedue a intonare i Salmi, Inni, Cantici e Versetti, e anco il Benedicamus Domino in mezzo al Coro. 4. A loro tocca a reggere il Coro e pero salmegghino distintamente con le pause piene nel mezzo de versi, senza code, e con le voci pari, e nelle feste solenni cantino più adagio.

That cantore were selected by their peers indicates that this was a place of honor, an acknowledgment of an individual talent that set one woman apart from another in a place where institutional conformity was the rule. Some convents were known to have accepted, even wooed, women with musical knowledge or girls who showed exceptional talent with the promise of reduced or even negated dowries.¹⁵ No known evidence exists to suggest that La Concezione ever offered any sort of incentive to a singer or player; nor would such an arrangement be likely given the already small dowry for families with the requisite familial status and the mandate to limit the number of women permitted to live in the cloister. Additionally, virtuosity was not a prized virtue in monophonic performance, hence, a “trained singer” would not have been particularly sought after as a new member of the community; this is very much in keeping with the notion of an ideal community bonded through chant, the most ancient and purest form of Christian music.

In seeming contrast to the principles of devotion through monophony, a phrase of particular interest in the above passage is that the cantore should sing in *voci pari*, that is, “equal voices” or “similar voices.” In Italy, the term referred to male voices singing secular or sacred works in two or three parts that were close in range, in other words—written without boy or falsetto parts. The practice was thought to be extinct by the seventeenth century, but as this reference proves, the custom continued through this

¹⁵ Colleen Baade, ““Hired” Nun Musician in Early Modern Castile,” in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin LaMay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 287-310. In Florence, Le Murate was known to give dowry reductions to “bass” singers, violists and organists, K.J.P. Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 266-81.

conservative guise.¹⁶ The practice of *voci pari* eliminated the need for sisters as virtuosic performers because the music was arranged with either one or two voice parts that were close in range, probably in the middle of the female vocal range so that it might be accessible to all voices.

The passage above could be specifically targeted to the soloists or choir leaders as a reminder that they should not re-write or embellish their parts with fashionably high *passaggi*. It also seems possible that the authors were referring to the choir dividing into soprano and alto parts but not allowing additional harmonic lines such as the tenor and bass parts that were sung by women in other institutions.¹⁷ The inclusion of other restrictions—singing at a slow tempo, prohibitions against adding anything extra (such as *passaggi*, ornaments or embellished cadences), and the obligation to pause between verses, indicate that the *voci pari* rule was probably not in breaking the mandate of plainchant and monophony but rather was in keeping with the inclination to limit musical expression to simpler forms.

Perhaps because La Concezione was so wealthy, it was expected that all sisters should be able to read, as is stated in the description of the education girls received in the convent.¹⁸ Musical literacy, however, appears to be expected of the women who served as

¹⁶ Frank Carey, "Composition for Equal Voices in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Musicology* 9/3 (Summer 1991): 300-42.

¹⁷ Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles*, 266-81; Michael Talbot, "Tenors and Basses at the Venetian Ospedali," *Acta Musicologica* 66/2 (July-December 1994): 123-38.

¹⁸ Stephanie Lawrence-White, "Musical education at the Ospedale degli Innocenti, Florence" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, District of Columbia, 2005); Zannini Masetti and Gian Ludovico, *Motivi storici della educazione femminile (1500-1650), I: Morale, religione, lettere, arte, musica* (Bari, Italy: EditorialeBari, 1980); Sharon T. Strocchia, "Taken into Custody: Girls and Convent Guardianship in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 17/2 (2003): 177-200, and "Learning the Virtues: Convent

cantore, if not of all of the *professe*. This included not only reading notes and rhythms, but perhaps also keeping the sisters in tune, providing the starting pitch or even rudimentary conducting. In support of the notion that responsorial singing was expected, the singers were specifically instructed to alternate singing from one side of the altar, to the other. Depending on the occasion and the genre or texts being sung, *cantore* may have sung as soloists, as leaders of different choirs or as part of the select choir.

In addition to the mandates of the Constitution, the Charter makes mention of the use of music as it relates to the activities of the Priest from the Order, the hired musicians and the cloistered participants.

When the Priest enters into the church, begin to sound the organ, and continue until he has said the prayer and taken the paraments. At this juncture however, when the Priest has made the preparation, cease the playing of the organ because while he vests himself, the Sisters [follow one another] to come to the [above-mentioned] interior church singing the Hymn *Jesu corona Virginum*. [When] the Virgins have arrived in the interior church and they have finished the singing of the Hymn, the Musicians shall play instrumental music (*sinfonia*), let them begin to perform the polyphonic Mass, and let them do sung sections and motets to the wishes of the Chapel Master. After the Priest has communed with the most precious Blood, he will go to the little window to give communion to the Virgins. At that precise moment, the Musicians do not perform, but three *Domine non sum dignus* are said by the Priest, then the [musicians] shall play instrumental music (*sinfonia*) ending it when the Monsignor returns to the Altar, at that point the sisters sing the verse *Mel, et lac*. After the end of the Mass, [the musicians] will play other music until the Priest has deposited the *Pianata* and takes the *Piviale*, in order to make the blessing of the Habits.¹⁹

Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence,” in *Women’s Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead (New York: Garland, 1999), 3-46; Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ ASPi 2878. Libro Seconda, Sessione prima, Capitolo 11. Dell’Organista e Musici, p.121-22. Nell’entrare il Prelato in chiesa conviene sonar l’organo, e seguitare fino a che non ha fatto orazione, e pigli i paramenti. In questa congiuntura [per]ò quando il Prelato ha fatto la preparezione cessi di sonar l’organo

As the events or rituals to which these rules apply are not specified, it is unclear as to whether this format would be followed during all masses or only during certain rites. Certainly, the inclusion of outside musicians would seem to indicate that this protocol was designed for a formal ritual or a high feast day, and the blessing of the habits advances the notion that these directions were for an investiture or profession ceremony.

A clear semantic distinction is made between the men, referred to as ‘the musicians’ reminding the reader of their position as professionals, while the women providing the music are only referred to as *monache* who happen to be singing at that moment. This avoids any implication that the devout virgins are in any way sullied by the tinge of ‘musician.’ The passage illustrates the distinction between the ‘soundscapes’ of (worldly) complex polyphony provided by the exterior musicians and the (cloistered) pure monophony of the sisters in that those playing instruments and providing polyphony were all male and publicly visible, and the sisters above the altar and hidden by a wall provided the plainchant. The two musics could not co-exist, just as the performers could not intermingle; the service was even divided into its liturgical sections based on the type of music. Organ polyphony stops for the chanted entrance of the sisters, polyphony returns until the sisters are to take communion for which the instrumentalists and vocalists are silent, polyphony returns and is then suspended for the sisters’ last chant,

[per]che mentre si para, le Mon[ach]e sagiandi devono venire nella suco chiesa interiore cantando l'Inno Jesu corona Virginum. Giunte le Vergini nella chiesa intesiore e terminato di cantar l'Inno i Musici faccino sinfonia, e cominino a cantar la Messa, e faccino le cantate, e mottetti a volontà del Maestro di Cappella. Quando il Prelato dopo che si sarà comunicato col preziosissimo Sangue ua alla fiestrella [per] comunicare le Ver[ergin]i in quell'istante i Musici non cantano, ma detto dal Prelato tre volte Domine non sum dignus, allora faccino sinfonia, terminar-dola quando Mons[ignor] ritorna all'Altare, acciò le Sagrande possino cantare il Versetto Mel, et lae. Terminata la Messa fanno altra sinfonia fin' a tanto che il Prelato non abbi deposto la pianata e preso il piviale, [per] far la benedizione degli Abiti.

and finally, the Mass begins as it ended, with polyphony. The simplified texture of the devotional hymns and the silence of the most important part of the Mass, the Eucharist, reflect the ways in which plainchant was used as an indicator of the purity and holiness of the sisters.

The musicians are instructed here to follow practices found in many churches in the seventeenth century—an organist and a group of instrumentalists play before, after and during the service (especially before, after or as part of the Eucharist) and as an accompaniment to singers. It appears from this account that the sounds of polyphony were a common practice, and the repeated references to *sinfonia* reinforce the idea that La Concezione was very much aware of trends in contemporary music, rather than being a strict, anti-polyphony institution. The language, specifically the word “sinfonia” used to describe the music, is not from the late sixteenth century—rather it reflects seventeenth-century usage.²⁰ However, as the account books provide many examples of hired musicians, some in the early years of the convent’s existence, it is likely that polyphony became part of the musical tradition of the convent soon after its habitation.

The musical performance practice of alternation described here provides some interesting detail concerning the relationship between the musicians—both internal and external. First, the organ provides prelude music—a common practice known to all but the poorest churches; however, it is unclear as to whether the organ is being played by a sister or by a hired musician. If the organ was located in the choir loft or the interior chapel, certainly it would have been proper for the sisters to provide this music. The

²⁰ In which case, the extant copy of the Charter is a seventeenth-century (or later) copy.

account books attest to their ability to do so— *Senior Giuliano l'organista*, mentioned in the previous chapter, was paid to teach Suora Virginia beginning in 1594 until *Signor Giovanni Batista Soldani* (or Soldato) took over in 1598 as the teacher *di tasti*, literally “of keys,” without any specific mention of a pupil. The more or less regular lesson payments imply that the skill of performance was important enough to pay through the convent funds, rather than as a personal investment.²¹ It should be kept in mind that the organ could be used many different ways—as a continuo instrument and as an accompaniment to chant, as well as solo or ensemble polyphony. Giuliano was also paid to play the organ for important occasions such as the feasts of the Conception and investitures in the 1590s.²² As evidence exists for both the sisters and the external musicians playing the organ, and as convent financial records show, there were at least two organs; one was probably near the altar, so that it was accessible to men, and one was probably in the cloistered chapel where it could be played by sisters without breaking *clausura*.

Following the organ prelude, the sisters enter the chapel from the convent singing *Jesu corona Virginum*, a hymn from the Ambrosian tradition that was part of the Common of Virgins used at Lauds and Vespers. If not for the singing, the entrance of the virgins perhaps would have gone unnoticed due to the walls and grates that obscured them from view as they moved from the cloister to the interior chapel. In this “public” ceremony, the cloistered sisters’ are present primarily through their performance of chant,

²¹ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, beginning in September 1594, f.53r.

²² ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605.

that is, they are in attendance through their signature sound—one that symbolized their adherence to the musical reforms associated with the Council of Trent.

As the ritual begins, the musicians are instructed to play *sinfonia* and to begin singing the Mass. Unlike the hymns and verses explicitly stated for the sisters to sing, the *sinfonia* is not described as a particular piece or even a type of piece; in the seventeenth century, *sinfonia* could have been any instrumental work either newly composed or one already in the musicians' repertory. The specificity of the chants coupled with the intentional vagueness of the instrumental music clearly illustrates that the chants had deep-rooted meaning and that choosing them was done carefully, while the pieces identified only as "*sinfonia*," were not as important to the devotions of the sisters—they were simply there to provide entertainment value rather than devotional.

During Communion, the musicians cease and the priest recites the passage "Lord, I am not worthy," one that perhaps had special meaning for the women because they are the words of the centurion to Christ when he offered to cure the man's daughters in Matthew 8:8. The last music required of the nuns is the verse "Honey and Milk" from the Song of Songs 4:11 ("Your lips drip honey-comb, O bride/ Honey and Milk are under your tongue/ The scent of your garments is like that of Lebanon"). The verse is a description made by the foreign husband about the sweetness of his bride, although the allegorical poem has been interpreted to represent many relationships—that of God to Israel, Christ and the Church, Christ and Mary, Christ and the human soul, the courtly love of a man and woman and in this context—Christ as the bridegroom and the

professing monastic woman as his bride.²³ As it is used here, the proverbial honey could also be the sweet sounds pouring forth from the lips of the choir members. Perhaps the sisters sang this as a reminder of their intended disposition—to accept their position and make themselves sweet and pleasing to Christ.

The two groups of musicians, separated by brick and iron but united by the conventions of the church, took turns in providing the music. The men sang the Mass, probably a polyphonic setting, and played undefined instrumental interludes. The women, on the other hand, sang specific hymns and verses that reinforced their chastity, their virtue and their femininity. The dichotomy of male versus female, the professionalism of the chapel master versus the female choir sans named leader, the seen versus the hidden, the complexity of polyphony versus the simplicity of monophony and plain settings, and musical freedom versus pre-determined texts, all mirror the life of a cloistered female monastic. The women would have seen their role in society reflected in this musical interaction.

Not all music took place in (semi) public; the refectory was deep within the cloister and probably rarely saw a male presence. Morning and evening meals included several opportunities for music-making such as singing Psalms on the way to the hall, prayers, benedictions and memorializations.

On the Order for the Refectory in the morning and evening: ... 2. When the last of the bells for dining sound, those that are not legitimately impeded shall make their way in the direction of the chapter hall, and there

²³ Shai Burstyn, "Early 15th-Century Polyphonic Settings of *Song of Songs* Antiphons," *Acta Musicologica* 49/2 (July-December 1977): 200-27; Robert Gordis, "A Wedding Song for Solomon" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63/3 (September 1944): 263-70.

gathered they shall begin the Psalm *De profundis* for the souls of the dead and they shall go in an orderly fashion to wash their hands, and while they wash, they shall say the Cantic *Benedictus D[omin]us Deus Israel* with the *Gloria [Patri]* for the living Princes; and afterwards they shall enter the dining hall in pairs saying the Cantic *Magnificat* with the Requiem for the deceased Princes in the morning, and in the evening for the Duchess Eleonora. The youngest sisters should lead the entrance and all disposing themselves in the proper order stand by the tables; and the Abbess or her substitute will say Benedicite and the Sisters shall continue the blessing according to the rite in the Roman Breviary. When finished, all shall be seated at their places, in order of Rank- by first professed, but no one should begin to eat without the Superiores having given the signal.²⁴

De Profundis, the penitential Psalm 130, was sung each morning and evening for the departed, in particular for the Dukes and Duchesses of Florence; this was followed by the song of thanksgiving introduced by Saint Benedict taken from Luke 1:68-69 and finally, praise for the reigning prince. It is significant that the small acts of gathering and washing were accompanied by song just as meals and bedtime were preceded by prayers and benedictions. Music kept time, not just through recitation of the Daily Offices at intervals, but also with the musical repetitions of daily activities. Music helped to create a sense of community among the sisters—a shared set of experiences that bonded them as a family.

²⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo secondo: Dell'Ordine del'Refettorio mattina, e ser, p.86.

2. Quando suona l'ultimo della mensa tutte quelle che non sono legittimamente impedita s'inviano alla volta del'Capitolo, e quivi adunate comincino il salmo De profundis per l'Anima de defunti: e vadino, ordinatamente a lavarsi le mani, e mentre si lavano dichino il Cantic Benedictus D[omin]us Deus Israel con la gloria per i principi viventi; È in dià coppia entrino in Refettorio dicendo il cantic Magnificat con la Reque per i Principi defunti la mattina, e la sera per la duchessa Eleonora cominciando l'entrare dalle inferiori e tutte si accomodino per ordine di qua, e di la dalle mense in piedi; e la Bad[ess]a o altra che tenga il suo luogo dica Benedicite, e le Mon[ach]e seguitino la Benedizione secondo il rito del'breviario romano. Quale finita; tutte si poghino a sedere al loro luoghi, per ordine di Grado, e di anzianita di Professione, ma nessuna comincia mangiare sino che non e fatto segno dalla Sup[erior]a.

One of the most important and frequent chants that the sisters were required to sing was the *Magnificat*. While the prayer was significant to all Catholics, female monastics surely would have felt a personal connection to the story. “My soul doth Magnify the Lord,” the Cantic of Mary from Luke 1:46-55 was said – or perhaps chanted – when the virgin visited her cousin Elizabeth in praise of God’s esteemed favor to his people. The women sing together of praise and trust in God when they are most vulnerable, one unmarried and pregnant and the other long infertile yet now pregnant; the joyous pronouncement of the two women may be seen as the redemption of the sin of one woman, Eve. It is the story of virtues— one had faith, one had patience; women living in monasticism, the virtuous opposite of secular femininity, would have taken comfort in the moral that faith would bring them honor as Mary was honored as the mother of Jesus and patience would be rewarded as Elizabeth bore John the Baptist. One of the three New Testament Canticles, the Magnificat was traditionally sung at Vespers and flanked by antiphons appropriate to the season; Marian antiphons were particularly popular in convents across Catholic Europe. Following the Magnificat, the women of La Concezione sang the memorials for another woman— Eleonora, the bearer of princes and the mother of their convent. The community honored through song the most important heavenly woman and the most important worldly woman side-by-side.

At other times of the day, most commonly in the evenings, the Abbess led her community in antiphons and prayers primarily to the Virgin Mary but also to the highlighted saint of that month – by implication, this was the saint that the women of La Concezione were to idealize through imitation.

When they have not celebrated the peace (pace) in the choir, they will do so after the above-mentioned prayer, saying the Antiphon *Da pace[m] Domine* with its versicle, response and Prayer. After which they shall say nine *Ave Maria*'s to show reverence for the Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary and the nine months that Saint Anna carried her in her womb. Having finished that, the Antiphon *Cum iucunditate* will be intoned with the verse and the Prayer *Deus qui de B[ea]te M[aria] Virg[in]is Conceptione*. Afterwards they will make the commemoration for the Saint whose turn it is for the convent to celebrate that month. The Superiora will remind [the sisters] what is to be observed and any information she needs to relay, and lastly in the day as Mother of the Family to her daughters she will say the Benediction *Dei omnipotentis* [and] Response: *Amen*. As the last thing, let them intone the Psalm *De profundis* for all of the dead, and let them say the Prayer [of the faithful] *Fidelium Deus*, and during this the Abbess should give the holy water, and then everyone will proceed to lunch or dinner depending on the orders listed above.²⁵

The *pacem*, or the peace, was a monastic tradition common during profession rites where the novice would give the kiss of peace to each member of the community as a sign of his or her intention to be a part of the community and he or she in return was given the kiss of peace as a sign of acceptance. La Concezione appears to have used the gesture not only during investiture and profession but also as part of the daily routine—a constant reinforcement of the bonds of sisterhood.

Nine *Hail Mary*'s connect the act of giving the peace to honoring the convent's dedicatory act, the Conception. The prayers in reverence to Anne as the giver of life

²⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo terzo: Della Benedizione che si fa avanti cena, in Capitolo, p.92.

... Quando in coro non sie fatto la commemoraz.e della pace si sarà doppo la sud[dett]ta orazione dicendo l'Antifona Da pace Domine col suo verso Respons e orazione. Doppo la quale si dichino nove Ave Marie a Reverenza della Concettione della S[antissim]a Verg[in]e M[ari]a, e de nove mesi che S.Anna la portò nelle sue viscere quali f[in]ite si intuoni l'Antifona Cum iucunditate col suo verso e l'Oraz[i]one deus qui de B[ea]te M[ari]a Vig[in]is Conceptione. Doppo si facci commenoraz[i]on[e] del Santo che e tocco al Convento in quel mese per forte. Dette queste cose la Sup[er]ior[a] ricordi l'osserva[n]ost[ra] e se occorre avvertire cosa alcuna l'avvertisca, e per ultimo dia la Benedizione come M[ad]re di Famiglia alle sue figliuole dicendo Beditio dei omnipotentis Rip: Amen. Si intuoni per ultimo il Psalmo De profundis per tutti i morti e si dica l'orazione fidelium Deus e in questo mentre la Bad[ess]a dia l'Acqua Benedetta, e poi si vada a Cena, o colizione secondo gl'ordini suddetti.

would have been a sacred enactment of giving birth that the sisters, as virgin brides of Christ, were never to experience. The women might also have perceived the symbolism of a woman bearing a woman in her womb as connecting them to Eleonora, who, as a woman, symbolically bore the convent of women.

Like the Magnificat's reverence of Mary and Elizabeth, Anne was celebrated for her womb (as was Eleonora for her fruitful production of many children, including two ducal heirs). The verse and antiphon also comment on the Conception, for which the convent was named and dedicated; the prayer comes from the fifteenth-century Franciscan feast of the Immaculate Conception; it was also used in the Hours of the Virgin.

In addition to the above observances, the Constitution was very specific about the evening prayers:

The Sisters are obligated to come together every evening in this manner: Gather the Sisters as a Chapter; the Superiora intones the Antiphon, *Sub tuum presidium*, which when finished all of the other Sisters respond with the verse *Ora pro nobis S[anc]ta dei Genitrix*, [with the] Response: *Ut digni efficiamur*. After the Prayer *Concede nos famulos tuos*, the Superiora follows with the antiphon for Saint Michael the Archangel, and they say the verset *In conspectu Angelorum*, with the Response *Adorabo ad templum* and with the Prayer *Perpetuum nobis Domine*. Then all of the Sisters standing on their feet with hands behind them in remembrance of the flagellation of Jesus shall say five *Pater Nosters* and five *Ave Marias*. After which is said *Oremus Pretende Domine famuli* and the Sisters respond *Amen* adding *Spiritus S[anc]ti gratia illuminet sensus [et] corda nostra*.²⁶

²⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo terzo: Della Benedizione che si fa avanti cena, in Capitolo, p.92.

... le Mon[ach]e sono obbligate intervenire ogni sera in questo modo: Adunate le Mon[ach]e in capitolo; la Sup[er]iora intona l'Antifona, Sub tuum presidium, la quale finita dall'altre Mon[ach]e col verso Ora pro nobis Sta dei Genitrix Resp[onde] Ut digni efficiamur con l'Orazione Concede nos famulos tuos, la Sup[er]iora seguita l'antifona S[an]te Michael Arcangele, e si dica il versetto In consp[ec]tu Angelorum, col

Prayers to Saint Michael, the warrior saint, imply that the Order was foremost in their thoughts.²⁷ The Archangel Michael has been previously connected to Eleonora and Cosimo as the protectors and defenders of the faithful.²⁸ Janet Cox-Rearick notes that the saint was painted above the altar in Eleonora's personal devotional space "as a symbol of victory over evil, of putting down of rebellion, and of the restoration of order."²⁹

The alternation between supplications intoned by the abbess and responses by the sisters heightened the distinction between communal singing while working or washing, and chant performed for the singular purpose of invoking the protection of the heavens. The Antiphon, *Sub tuum presidium*, or "Under thy protection," is a prayer of petition to Mary. It is an ancient prayer—one of the oldest to Mary, a litany to the Blessed mother that concludes Compline. The sisters respond from the Litany of the Saints, "Pray for us Holy Mother of God" and from the Rosary, the prayer to Mary, "Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord God, that we thy servants may enjoy lasting health."

After such strong invocations of Mary, the Abbess turns the attention of her community to Saint Michael. In Psalm 137, the respondent makes promises to God by way of his angels and asks in return for strength. It is particularly appropriate to be sung

Resp[onde] Adorabo ad templum e con l'Orazione Perpetuum nobis Domine. Di poi si dichino cinque pater, e cinque ave Marie da tutte le Mon[ach]e stanti in piedi con le mani di dietro in rimembranza della flagellazione di Giesu. Doppo le quali si dica Oremus Pretende Domine famulis e risposto dalle Mon[ach]e Amen soggiunga Spiritus S[an]ti gratia illuminet sensus [e] corda nostra.

²⁷ See Chapter Two for more on Saint Michael's association with the convent.

²⁸ Janet Cox-Rearick, "Bronzinòs Crossing of the Red Sea and Moses Appointing Joshua: Prolegomena to the Chapel of Eleonora di Toledo," *The Art Bulletin* 69/1 (March 1987): 45-67.

²⁹ Ibid. 65.

because it enjoins the faithful to sing.³⁰ The final prayers of the “intervention” ask for the benediction of the Holy Spirit. Female monastics played a special role in early modern society’s concept of city-wide salvation; virgin daughters were needed as brides of Christ to be the intermediaries between their earthly community and God, the Saints and particularly Mary, to whom the women were expected to have a special connection. By singing these many prayers, Santo Stefano and the Medici court sought the most supreme form of protection through the purest medium.

In contrast to the very specific instructions concerning the exact timing of sung prayers, the summer Vespers service allowed the choir mistress to choose some laude.

In the summer, before Vespers, that is at bed time, they should say in the choir as a group a part of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin, they should read some spiritual book, they should sing some laude, and they should keep a quarter of an hour of silence.³¹

This passage comes from the chapter on teaching the novices the virtues of the religious life. Novices were not allowed to sing as part of the choir until they professed their final vows and became a *corista*, literally, a sister of the choir. They were to learn the services and participate in their own rites as part of their education. As a last thought imparted before bed, the laude were seen as equally important to spiritual readings and silent contemplation. In the same passage, the novices are instructed to bless and fortify the monastery through music, “Every Sunday morning at that hour that seems most

³⁰ Psalm 130:5, “Et content in viis Domini quoniam magna gloria Domini.”

³¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Nono: Della Maestra, e Pedagoga delle Novizie e Noviziato, p.191.

14. ... L'Estate avanti Vespro cioè nel tempo della Dormizione, dichino a Coro una parte del Rosario della Mad[dalen]a, leggino qualche li[br]o spir[tual]e, Cantino qualche lauda, e tenghino un quarto d'ora di silenzio.

appropriate they will send two Novices to bless the most important places of the Monastery saying the Psalm *Miserere* and the Psalm *Confitemini* the First one.”³² The Penitential Psalm 51, “Have mercy on me, O God” is well known to history, and particularly to Florence where a century before, Savonarola had used the Psalm to great devotional effect. The second of the passages to be used by the novices, the first *Confitemini* is Psalm 104, a thanksgiving to God for his benefits to his people.

The novitiate class was an essential component of the continuing existence of La Concezione. As the community did not take many young girls solely as transitory *educande*, nor did they take widows or other displaced women, it was imperative to have a continuous group of young women in training to take the professed vows. Most of the young women would have been between the ages of twelve and sixteen, the ages assigned by the Council of Trent as the earliest a girl could enter and the youngest she could profess formal vows, respectively. Many came with a secular education—they could already read, write, sing and play music; wealthy urban families were known to provide their daughters with strong humanist educations. Evidence of this at La Concezione exists in the form of promissory/affirmation notes signed by the daughters and family members; the handwriting and signatures of the girls are mostly the polished hand of those with reading and writing experience.³³

³² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Nono: Della Maestra, e Pedagoga delle Novizie e Noviziato, p.191.

14. ... Ogni domenica mattina a quell'ora che parrà loro più opportuna manderanno due Nov[izi]e a benedire i luoghi più principali del Mona[ster]o dicendo il Salmo Misere e il Salmo Confitemini di Prima.

³³ All of the professing daughters could sign their name, some better than others. Most of the servants could as well, although many signed with a cross. ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 51, Libro Vestiari e Presiori 1592-1734, Book 3.

The Novitiate education specifically channeled those abilities towards the religious vocation. Most convents accepted girls as *educande* and had a separate mistress and daily schedule; however, neither the Constitution nor the Charter give instructions or rules pertaining to *educande* and the only one mentioned elsewhere is Maria Cristina de' Medici— and presumably her ladies-in-waiting. La Concezione did accept girls as young as twelve (per Trent) and probably treated them as novices until the formal novitiate year and the profession of final vows at sixteen.

The following passage describes the responsibilities of the caretakers of the Novices. Informally this would have been the girls' aunts, cousins and sisters but formally, there were officers whose job it was to instruct the incoming class of new sisters.

These [sisters] shall take custody of the Novices, and try their best to illuminate them and to instruct them in the Religious Life and in the Christian Virtues; they will have them learn the Christian Doctrine and to recite the day of the feasts and to say together the declaration of Cardinal Bellarmine, they make them read a spiritual book, or the lives of Saints, and make conversation over whichever was read during dinner. In order to make them attentive to the lesson, they shall teach them to say the prayers, the examination of Conscience, the manner of proper confession, and the preparation for the Holy Communion. They will also teach them the Ceremonies of the Choir, and all of the Regular Observances according to this Constitution, to read and write the order of the Daily Office, plainchant (canto fermo), the manual labor that is customary in the Monastery, and every other thing that a Religious woman needs.³⁴

³⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Nono: Della Maestra, e Pedagoga delle Novizie e Noviziato, p.191.

3. Queste custodiranno le Nov[izi]e, e s'ingegneranno di illuminarle e instruirele nella vita Rel[igios]a, e nelle virtu Cristiane; li faranno imparare la Dottrina cristiana, e il giorno delle feste gliela faranno recitare e gliela dichiarino conforme la dichiarazione del Bellarmino gli faranno leggere qualche libro spirituale, o vita di Santi, e fare qualche conferenza sopra di quelli o sopra quel che si e letto a mensa, per farle attente alla lezione, gli insegneranno far l'Orazione, l'esame di Coscienza, il modo di confessarsi bene, la preparazione ala Santissima Comunione; le Cirimonie del Coro, e tutte l'Osserva n[ost]re Regolari secondo

If polyphonic settings of hymns, laude and Psalms were commonly used in the cloister of La Concezione, they were not learned as part of the formal novitiate training. Leading the education of the novices was the *Maestra delle Novitiate*, a sister whose experience in all manners of religious life, including music, had to be substantial.

1. It is the common opinion of the Teachers of the religious life, that the spiritual well being of the Monastery depends in great part on the good education of the Novices; if, like tender plants, they are well directed into religious observance, they can keep themselves easily; thus among all of the Teachers of the classes, it is necessary that [the teacher of the] Novices, is the most spiritual of the above mentioned community in quality; and the most illuminated in the Religious Life, the most prudent and caring, and as it says in the Rule in Chapter 58, she should be suited to reach others' souls and must make herself be loved and feared like a prudent mother; and because by herself she would not be able to supply the needs of the Novices, if she is assigned a companion of about thirty years of age at least, who is suited to teach all of the Novices to read, write, sing and other things that Novices have a need to learn.³⁵

A final opportunity for music in the daily life of a sister of La Concezione comes in the form of music during daily chores. Although the Constitution mandates that all sisters work for the benefit of the convent, it is unclear as to whether professed sisters from wealthy families actually performed manual labor or if such tasks were left exclusively to the *converse*. It is likely that “work and daily manual exercises” meant

queste Const[itution]i, Il leggere e scrivere l'ordinare l'Ufizio, il Canto fermo; i lavori manuali che usano in Mona[ster]o, e ogni altra cosa che bisogna a una Relig[os]a.

³⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Nono: Della Maestra, e Pedagoga delle Novizie e Noviziato, p.191.

1. E comune parere de Maestri di vita religiosa che il bene spirituale d'un Mona[ster]o dependa in gran parte dalla buona educazione delle Novizie; per che se come tenere piante sono bene addirizzate nell'osserva n[ost]ra religiosa facilmente si mantengono; Pero tra tutte le M[aest]re delle Classe, e necessario che quella delle Nov[izi]e; oltre alle qualità suddette in Comune si la più spirituale; e la più illuminata della vita Religiosa, la più prudente e caritativa; e come dice la Regola nel Capitolo 58, sia atta a gradagniare l'aime altrvi e come Madre prudente sappi farsi amare e temere, E per che da per se sola non potrebbe supplire a bisogni delle Nov[izi]e, se li assegni una compagnia di circa trenta Anni almeno, la quale sia atta a insegnare alle Nov[izi]e, leggere, scrivere, cantare, e altre cose che le Nov[izi]e anno bisogno d'impare.

‘work by hand’ or the more feminine activities such as needlepoint rather than menial labor.

About Work and Daily Manual Exercises: 6. While they work they will raise their minds to God, and since they are not idle with their body, they stay not idle with their spirit, and to that purpose every now and then or they will read out loud some spiritual book, remain in silence, or they will recite some prayer all together simultaneously or they will sing some Lauda, or Hymn, or Canticle, or Psalm following the preference of the Abbess, or her substitute, and during the time that there is neither reading nor singing nor prayer, they will endeavor to have spiritual conversation.³⁶

Singing during work activities depended on the musical inclination of the Abbess; one from a musically-inclined family would have been more likely to engage her community in song rather than silence or reading. “Song” probably meant a monophonic tune, as their hands were otherwise occupied and could not hold music. However, part-singing and instrumental accompaniment are not implausible. In 1597, in one of the few references to musical instruments owned by the convent rather than by individuals, the account book notes the purchase of a spinet.³⁷ No manuscripts or prints are listed as expenses or property; it is likely that these were purchased (or copied) by the women who played the instrument or their families.

³⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo quarantesimo sesto: De Lauori, e esercizi manuali Quotidiani, p.144.

6. Mentre che lavorano procureranno alzare la mente a Dio, e si come non stanno oziose col corpo, cosi non stieno oziose con l'animo, e per ciò di quando in quando o leggeranno forte qualche lib[r]o spirituale, tenedo tutte silenzio, o reciteranno qualche orazione tutte insieme a coro o canteranno qualche Lauda, o Inno, o Cantico, o Salmo secondo che piacerà alla M[adre] Bad[ess]a, o a quella che quivi tiene il suo luogo e nel tempo che non si legge ne canta ne si dice oraz.o s'ingegneranno avere ragionamenti spirituali

³⁷ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.92r. It is listed as an expense of the sacristy, so it may have been located in the choir.

Rituals

By their very nature, elaborate ceremonies and rituals were an important part of the religious vocation of early modern convents— they conveyed devotion, sacrifice, joy of spirit and reverence for God and the Church. These events served an important social function as well, not only for the inhabitants of the convent but also for the city in which they resided. Rituals, through their words, music, and symbolism, connected the women to each other through established traditions as they allied the convent to the world beyond the walls where their families and government depended on the prayers and sacrifices enacted during ritual acts.

In convents across Europe, music was used in many different types of simple and complex observances— it ranged from monophonic chants to extravagant polyphony with the choirs and instruments popular in contemporary society; in accordance with official decrees, performers came from the ranks of the sisters in the case of chant and outsiders were hired to provide polyphony. The ritual music could be internally organized by and for the women in their enclosed space, it could be performed by the women but witnessed or heard by others either from the parlor's public space or the main chapel, or music could come from professional musicians paid to sing or play in addition to or instead of the cloistered sisters. The arrangement of the performers depended largely on the convent's musical and financial resources as well as its religious proclivity; a “reformed” convent with strict enclosure might be disinclined to use outside musicians, as would a very poor convent that could not afford to do so. However, a wealthy institution or one located near a musically active urban court might choose to enhance its

existing resources with local performers and composers for ceremonial occasions. La Concezione utilized the resources of the Order and the court for polyphony while the sisters sang only plainchant in order to create a clear distinction between the pure virgin daughters and the rest of the world.

There were two main categories of rituals in a convent: those that fulfilled the sacraments for Catholic secular society and those that were specific to a religious institution. The common rituals included the Daily Offices, and various Masses including the regular sung Masses, funeral Masses as well as more lavish celebrations of the Mass for feast days. The rituals special to a convent consisted mainly of the initiation rite and the formal profession, although music was often used during other special ceremonies such as officer induction and processions. A third ritual was traditional to convents, called the Consecration of Virgins, although reformers thought it only an excuse to spend money on luxuries and draw the public's attention to the women of the convent.³⁸ The Consecration ceremony continued to be popular at some convents, despite prohibitions against it; however, La Concezione never had such a tradition and in keeping with their image as a model of reform, never performed the ritual. Rather, they focused their energies on the investiture, the profession of vows, induction rites and processions; each of these will be discussed as they contributed to the musical culture of La Concezione.

Both the Constitution and the Charter sanctioned the use of music during many different types of rites, sometimes by indicating which texts should be sung and at other

³⁸ Monson, *Disembodied Voices*, 197-98.

times simply noting that music was appropriate. Both internal and external performers sang and played: guidelines for the former exist as rules laid out in the Constitution but detailed information as to how they performed the music is scant. As the latter were paid from the convent coffers, more documentation is available on their service. The allocation of funds in the account books, not only for musicians but also for teachers, instruments and books, indicates that music was a valued component in acts of celebration and remembrance from the earliest days of the convent through the close of the convent in the nineteenth century.

Regular entries are made in the *Libro Giornale*, the book that documented official expenses and incomes for the convent, which record payments made to one or more singers for *Messe cantate*. The names of the singers rarely appear; usually a representative of the Order is listed as the contact, or they are listed simply as “musici” or “cantore.”³⁹ These payments appear most months and sometimes two to three times a month, strongly indicating that the Mass was considered an opportunity to display the artistic resources of the Medici court and the Order of Santo Stefano. Such entries increase for key festivals, including the Holy Days, but special consideration was given to the local feast days such as 24 June, that of John the Baptist, the patron saint of

³⁹ The earliest example occurs one month after the opening ceremonies: ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.3r.

6 [Septembre] 1592: A spese di una messa cantando, [per] ogni S: [lire] sie [soldi] 15.p.tto m. cost.no n[ost]ro Capp[ella]no cont[o].

ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.53r.

15 Dicembre 1592: A spese di sagr[esti]a [per] la festa della Concep[tio]ne a Michele sagrest[a]no in S[an]ta Maria del fiore [lire] sess'eta sej [per] pagare la Messe piane et, li musici, et sonatore [per] la messa grande et 2 [vespri] la vigilia et il festo p[aga]to m[aest]re Cost.no n[ost]ro Conf[esser]o Cont[an]ti. ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.65r.

9 Agosto 1595: A spese [sagr[esti]a] [lire] dua [per] il cantore d[el]la messa di s[an]to stefa[no].

Florence, and the days special to the Medicean convent— Saint Stephen’s day on 2 August, mid-December for the anniversary of the death of Eleonora di Toledo, and on 21 March for Saint Benedict. For these events, and others such as the namesake feast of the “Santissima Concezione,” extra payments were made not only to musicians but also to merchants for special decorations, candle wax, gifts and food.⁴⁰ These elaborate celebrations would have been opportunities for the sisters of La Concezione to engage as members of a larger community— as dependents of the Order of Santo Stefano, as affiliates of the Medici court and as citizens of Florence.

Divine Offices

The Divine Offices, or the Canonical Hours, as the small services throughout the day, gave many opportunities to worship through music. The services ranged from early morning to late at night with Matins, Compline and Vespers as the most musical Offices.

At La Concezione, the *Ufizi Divini* were celebrated daily by the sisters in their chapel. The majority of the responsibility fell on the professed sisters whose services were longer and more elaborate than those for the *converse*. The details of the rites are outlined in the Constitution chapters twenty-eight to thirty-four, six of which discuss

⁴⁰ One such example is the 1600 feast for the Conception. ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.138v.

8 Dicembre 1600: A spese di sagr[esti]a /-uno [lire] 6.10 [per] [-] 8 di zucchero et [amount symbol] 3 di mandorle spese nella festa dlla S[antissim]a Concetione [per] [v]isitare gli operai et benefatore del Mon[aster]io. A spese d[i]ce /-nuove [lire] 3.6.8 [per] la Musica; a S[ignor] Constantino Arrighi Musico; et altri, P[re]ti p[aga]to S[ignor] Giorgio Conti.

For this feast they also purchased extravagant food, wine and desserts.

music. The first of these chapters is important because it details the professed sisters' duties.

They are permitted to say the Divine Office according to the Roman Breviary, and according to said Breviary to do so by the Order of Saint Benedict. And all of the professed sisters who are not legitimately impeded, under penalty of mortal sin, are obligated to this Office ... Beyond the seven canonical hours, the Choir of Sisters is obligated to recite the Office of the Madonna, that of the Dead, the Gradual and Penitential Psalms, and the Litany conforming to the Rubric of the Roman Breviary.⁴¹

The Roman Breviary, now reflecting post-Tridentine devotion, was used as the main source of text in addition to the non-canonical hour services required of the sisters; this included the *Salmi Graduali*— those Psalms of the Old Testament set monophonically.

Chapter twenty-seven of the Constitution is not about singing or playing but it does address the soundscape of the convent. It details the tolling of the bells: how many times the tower should sound for different services and for different groups within the convent. For example, for a sung Mass, the bells rang three times and twice for a plain Mass. When a sister died, the bells rang to commemorate her life: five times for the Abbess, four times for a professed sister and three times for a conversa.⁴² The hierarchy

⁴¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo quinto: Dell'Obbligo che anno le velate dire l'Ufizio Divino, e quale, p.97.

... et e concesso loro il dire l'Ufizio Divino secondo il Breviario Romano, e secondo il detto Breviario fare de S[an]ti dell'ordine di S[an] Bene[detto] E a questo Ufizio sono obbligate ogni giorno tutte le Mon[ach]e velate non impedito legittimamente, sotto colpa di peccato mortale, ... Oltre alle sette ore canoniche il Coro delle Mon[ach]e e obbligato a recitare l'u[fici]o della Madonna, quello de Morti, i Salmi Graduali, e Penitenziali, e le Litanie, conforme alle Rubriche del detto Breviario Rom[an]o.

⁴² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo settimo: Dell'ordine di sonare le campane a Divini Ufizi, p.98.

A vesperi delle festività di prima, e seconda classe si suoi suoni quattro volte a doppio, per lo spazzio di un attavo d'ora scarso per ciascun doppio, con tanto interuallio che nello spazio di mezz'ora o poco più siano sonati tutti à 4 i doppi ne doppi ordinarij si sonerà tre volte a doppio, per tanto spazio che in un terzo d'ora o poco più sieno sonati tutti a tre i doppi Ne semidoppi si suonera due volte con la canpana maggiore con la

of the bells clearly indicates what was valued by the sisters— just as an abbess was remembered with more peals, the *messa cantata* inspired additional ringing. As La Concezione was located in a densely populated part of the city, inside the city walls and in a populated area next to the monastery of Santa Maria Novella, it is likely that the bells were heard beyond the convent walls. This would have been a very public sign of the sisters’ pious activities, despite their invisibility. It is unclear why this chapter appears in the midst of the rules for the Offices rather than adjacent to it, other than the fact that often, the bells were rung to indicate a call to meet in the Choir for the celebration of an Office.⁴³

Only one chapter of the Constitution specifically addresses the times of day and their canonical activities. In chapter twenty-eight, the morning service of Matins is described, including the post-service Office of the Dead and the seven Psalms to be followed by leisure time. Vespers was always to include music, presumably chant, when held in the church and Compline included singing the Antiphons for the Madonna

sopradetta lunghezza e intervallo dall'uno all'altro ne feriali, e semplici si suonerà una sola volta con la campana seconda per un quarto d'ora. A Compieta si suonerà una sola volta per lo spazzio di un ottavo d'ora in circa. Al Mattutino delle feste di prima, e seconda classe si suonerà quattro d[op]pi come al Vespro. Nell'altre feste soneranno tre doppi con i medesimi intervalli, in modo che in spazzio di mezz'ora sia finito di sonare. Ne semidoppi come sopra al Vespro Nelle ferie, e ne semplici si suoni la Campana seconda una sola volta a lungo per lo spazzio d'un quarto d'ora. Dichiariamo che sempre dal principio del sonare all'andare in coro a Mattutino vi sia lo spazio di mezz'ora. Á Nona si suonerà una sol volta con la campana seconda, per lo spazio di un attavo d'ora. Alle Messe cantare ordinariamente si suonerà tre doppi. Alle piane nelle feste conamdate due doppi: ma quando ci fossero più messe dell'ordinario, si accomodino secondo il tempo, e secondo il numero delle Messe. Alle Morte doppio sonata l'Ave Maria per loro, quale vietiamo sonarsi di vote, si suoneranno cinque doppi alle Bad[ess]e, e quattro per le velate, e tre per le Serventi

Ne tre giorni della Passione di Giesu a tutti gli F[igl]i, e ordini si suonerà con le Tabelle.

⁴³ There is currently no literature on the ringing of bells as part of post-Tridentine devotion, although it would seem that, at least in this convent, bells and their musical and practical uses played a significant role in community life.

including the *Salve*, most probably the *Salve Regina*, and the most common, and one of the oldest of the Marian hymns, *Salve Regina* was often used at Compline right before bed in monastic practices. If the bells for the sick rang, the sisters were to begin to sing the Psalm 90, *Qui [h]abitat*, “He that dwelleth in the aid of the most High.”⁴⁴ The frequent reoccurrence of these chants meant that they were well known to the community and probably provided comfort in times of stress, such as the failing health of a sister.

The chapter regarding proper decorum during the Divine Offices regulates both sound and silence of the sisters during the services as well as when and how they exit the Choir. The sisters are instructed to conduct themselves with “gravity, devotion and modesty” according to their Rule.

When someone makes some aforementioned error of mixing up the words or the tune of the Psalm or Hymns, the singer shall correct herself and she will not get up, so as not to disturb the choir. Conforming to the Order of the Rule Chapter 12, in the *Coro*, no one shall sing anything other than plainchant (canto fermo). No instrument but the Organ shall be permitted in the feasts and solemnities that the Abbess shall determine. When singing the Mass, and on the occasions of investiture and veiling of the Sisters, as well as on the feasts of the Monastery, the Offices of Holy Thursday, Friday and Saturday, or in other offices that the Church is open, as well as for funerals, the Sisters are never to approach the grates of the Choir loft, but they must stay above the altar [in the choir].⁴⁵

⁴⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo ventesimo ottavo: Dell'ora di suonare a mattutino, e all'altre ore Canoniche, p.100.

3. Doppo Mattutino immediatamente si dica Prima se pero non si avessi a dire l'u[fizi]o de Morti, o i sette salmi e finita Prima usciranno di coro, e per un terzo d'ora resteranno libere, ne mai si unischino immediatamente le altre ore diurne, perche e contro il rito della Chiesa, e contro la Reg[ol]a nel Capitolo 47. ...

5. A Vespro si suonerà sempre quando il duomo, e il giorno delle feste comandate v'intervenghino anco le Serventi non legittinamente impedito e la loro Maestra ne tenga conto. ... Alla Salve e all'altre Antifone della Mad[donn]a che si cantano nel fine di Compia si suoni il Campanello dell'Infermeria, cominciando a sonarlo dal salmo Qui [h]abitat.

⁴⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo: Della Reverenza, modestia, e silenzio con che si de ue stare a divini ufizi, e uscire di Coro, p.103.

This passage is central to the argument that La Concezione held fast to plainchant as a means of ritual singing rather than abandon the practice for fashionable polyphony as many of their contemporaries had done. It is worth noting that while polyphony was specifically banned in the space of the interior chapel, at least when the full company was assembled as a choir, the rule does not ban polyphony elsewhere and as the examples in the previous section attest, many hymns, laude and canticles were sung as part of daily life outside the chapel. Polyphony was limited to the refectory, the common rooms and the chapter hall—the most secluded areas of the convent; this limited any filtration into the chapel, which was clearly defined as a monophonic space. Of additional interest in this passage, no instrument but the Organ was to be used, implying that other instruments may have been permitted, but not in the choir loft. Another passage that allows for the possibility of instrumental performance other than on the organ is quoted and discussed in the beginning of this chapter, where it is unclear if “organo” refers to the organ or any instrument generically.⁴⁶

...Se bene a tutte le Mon[ach]e si conviene lo stare in Coro con gravita, devozione, e modestia; contuttociò la Reg[ol]a nel Capitolo 47 ne fa speciale istanza a quelle che fanno Ufizio particolare intorno all'vf[izi]o Di[vin]o, come l'Eddomedaria, Cantore, Antifonarie, e lezzionarie, come quelle che in ciò che dicono sodiffauno per tutto il Coro Se alcuna farà disavvedutamente qualche strepito, o errore in Coro in leggere, cantare, o in altra cirimonia, come dice la Reg[ol]a nel Capitolo 45 si umilij avanti a tutte inginocchiandosi avanti alla Bad[ess]a, ...

Quando alcuna fa qualcuno de suddetti errori di scambiamenti di cose da dirsi o di tuoni di salmi, o Inni, la Corista [sola] [s]i corregga e non si sollevi, ne conturbi il Coro. Conforme all'ordine de Capitolo vechi al Capitolo 12 nel Coro no[n] si canti se non di canto fermo, ne vi si permentta mai altro suono che l'Organo nelle feste e solennita che vorrà la M[adre] Bad[ess]a. Quando si canta la Messa, così de vestimenti e velamenti delle Mon[ach]e, come nelle feste del Mona[ster]o nelli Uf[fic]i del Giovedi, Venerdi, e Sabato santo, o in altri Uf[fic]i che si faccino a Chiesa aperta, e ne Mortorij mai le Mon[ach]e l'accorstino alle grate del Coro [ma] stieno dall'Altare in fu.

⁴⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55.

A set of rules, reminders and reprimands to all of the convents of the diocese was printed in 1619 by Alessandro Marzi Medici, the Archbishop of Florence and prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. It included two rules for music making in the convents. The first such rule banned exactly the same musical behaviors the Council of Trent prohibited two generations earlier, “it shall be banned from choirs of sisters the playing and singing of indecent [music], laughter, joking and all of that, which is not proper to do.”⁴⁷ The second decree stated “the Sisters shall not sing nor play in such a way that they are able to be heard by secular people if not while saying the Divine Offices, at which time, they shall only play the Organ or other similar ecclesiastic instruments, and they shall sing only sacred motets in Latin, not in Italian.”⁴⁸ Like the first rule, the second reiterated the basic reforms of Trent, but provided details that allowed the archbishop some leeway as to the enforcement of reform: they may only sing motets (presumably this was used generically to include laude and devotional hymns), and they must be sung in Latin, but “ecclesiastic instruments” leaves some room for interpretation—a sentiment copied by La Concezione in the two passages above where it is indicated that instruments other than the organ may be acceptable, or at least not forbidden. This also implies that the archbishop knew, and may have even approved the

10. Rinnoviamo l'obbedienza de capitoli vecchi al Capitolo 12 che bisognando a alcuna Mon[ac]a imparare Canto fermo o figurato, o suono etiam che di Organo...

⁴⁷ BNCF Collection Maglibeccchiano. (hereafter, Coll. Magli.) 10.5.17/b.

9. Si bandischino da chori delle Mon[ach]e i suoni, & i canti indecenti, le risa le burle e tutto quello, che non convien fare.

⁴⁸ BNCF Coll. Magli. 10.5.17/b.

28. Non cantino ne suonino le Mon[ach]e in modo, che possano essere senti e da secolari se non mentre si dicano i divini offizii, nel qual tempo solo soneranno l'Organo, o altri simili strumenti ecclesiastichi, e canteranno solamente mottetti sacri, in latino, non in Italiano.

performance of polyphony by monastic females as long as it was in Latin. La Concezione, then, was not only following the rules of Trent and the Archbishop, (to whom they were only minimally responsible, see Chapter Two) but the convent surpassed the restrictions by not even indulging in the approved Latin polyphony.

The sisters were not to be heard by outsiders other than during the approved offices, but the phrasing implies that the archbishop meant that while the sisters were in the interior chapel they were not to sing unabashedly; did the rule still allow for singing in the parlor or in the courtyard where they might be overheard by passersby? Although not written for any specific convent, these two reprimands clearly indicate the musical culture common in other Florentine female religious institutions. La Concezione's practice of mostly monophony then, distinguished the community by way of contrast.

Perhaps one of the most important chapters for defining musical culture, chapter thirty-three is entitled "Which Masses and Which Offices must be sung by the Sisters,"

It is never permitted for Priests nor any others to sing Masses or Offices in [our] Church, except for the funerals of the sisters, except for such [cases], the Sisters will always be the ones to sing as ordered by the Rule in Chapter 12. The priests will sing the office of the dead "con musica" [polyphony] for the professed sisters and plainchant for the servant sisters. The following will be sung therefore by the Sisters, the Mass on the morning of [the feast of] the Conception of the Most Holy Virgin, and on the Holy Days, on the morning of Saint Michael in September, the morning of Saint Stephen Pope and Martyr, the morning of Saint Benedict, the night of Christmas, for the Circumcision of Christ, for Epiphany, for the Purification, the morning of Easter for the Ascension, the first feast of the Holy Spirit, the morning of Corpus Domini, of John the Baptist, the Apostolic Saints Peter and Paul, for the Assumption, and of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin and the morning of All Saint's Day. The morning of the Dead, [the sisters] will sing Mass for all the deceased faithful, and the next day, if not hampered, [they will sing Mass] for the deceased Sisters, this is followed the next day, if not hampered, by [a

Mass for] our departed Princes; at its time the Anniversary of the Duchess Eleonora di Toledo and that of the Grand Duke Ferdinand I [are celebrated].

On all of the feast days that one sings the Mass, at Matins they shall sing the hymn *Te Deum Laudamus*. The night of Christmas, sing the Invitatory with the Hymn, and the first nocturne with the lessons and the other nights sing only the lessons, the *Te Deum Laudamus*, the Hymn of the *Laudi*, and the Cantic *Benedictus*. On the day of Easter of the Resurrection, sing the *Te deum Laudamus*, the verse *Hec dies*, the Cantic *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*, for the Conception, the Hymn, the Cantic *Benedictus* and the lessons. On all of these feast days, it is commanded sing the Mass, Terce, and Compline.

On all of the Feast Days specified, [the Choir] will sing Vespers including also the Sunday services. During Holy Week, that is Wednesday, Thursday, Holy Friday, in addition to the sung Mass, during Matins should be sung the *Lamentations*, the Cantic *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*, on Holy Saturday sing the Mass.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo terzo: Quali Messe, e quali Ufizi devono cantarsi dalle Monache, p.109.

Non si ammetta mai Preti ne altri a cantare messe e Ufizi nella loro Chiesa, se non ne mortorij delle suore, fuoir de quali canteranno sempre le Monache come ordinario i Capitoli vecchi al cap[itolo] 12 ne quali Mortorij si canterà da Preti tutto l'ufizio de Morti, alle velate con musica, alle Serventi di canto fermo. Se canteranno dunque dalle Monache le Messe la mattina della Concettione della Santo Stefano Verg[in]e, e della Sacra, al mattina di S[an] Michele di Settembre, La mattina di Santo Stefano Pape e Martire, la mattina di S[an] Benedetto al notte del natale di N[ostro] S[ignor] per la sua Circoncisione per l'Epiphania per la Purificazione; la mattina di Pasqua per l'Ascensione; la prima festa dello Spirito Santo, la mattina del Corpus Domini; di S[an] Giovan Batista, de S[an]ti Apostoli Pietro, e Paolo, della Assunzione, e della Natività della S[antissim]a Verg[in]e e la mattina d'Ognissanti, la mattina de Morti si canterà la Messa per tutti i fedeli defunti, il di seguente non impedito per le Mon[ach]e defunte, è il seguente appresso non impedito per i nostri Principi defunti; di oi a suo tempo l'Anniversario per la Duch[ess]a Eleonora di Toledo e quello del Gran Duca Ferdinando I.

In tutti i giorni di festa che si canta la Messa, al Mattutino si canti l'Inno *Te Deum laudamus*.

La notte del Natale di N[ostro] S[ignor], si canti l'Invitatorio con l'Inno, e il primo notturno con le lezioni a gli altri notturni si canti solamente le lezioni, il *Te Deum laudamus*, l'Inno delle laudi, e il Cantic *Benedictus*, Nel giorno di Pasqua di Resurrzione si canti il *Te Deum laudamus*, il verso *Hec dies*, il Cantic *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel* per la Concettione l'Inno, il Cantic *Benedictus*, e le lezioni. In tutti questi giorni di festa comandara che si canta la Messa, si cantera, Terza, e Compieta.

In tutte le Feste comandate si canterà vespro comprendendo anco le Domenich. Nella settimana santa, cioè il Mercoledì, giovedì, e Venerdì santo, oltre la Messa cantata, si cantino al Mattutino le Lamentazioni, e il cantic *Benedictus dominus Deus Israel* anco il Sabato santo si cantera la Messa.

Instructing not only Offices to be sung, but also certain feasts that must include particular chants, this chapter clarifies the role music played in convent services. Since La Concezione had only a small area with the altar and room for the priest, musicians and invited guests, rather than the large public chapel common to most ‘double church’ structures of convents, the music was mainly for the benefit of the sisters of La Concezione although there was probably space for a small congregation, perhaps the ducal family, cavalieri and invited guests.

The *Te Deum Laudamus*, “We praise thee Lord” is a prayer of thanksgiving for special blessings, traditionally used during monastic professions. On Easter, in addition to the *Te Deum*, the verse *Haec dies*, is sung; the physical “center” of the Bible, Psalm 118 was popular for musical settings including verse twenty-four, “this is the day that the Lord hath made.” Holy Week in particular had specific texts designated as the ones that would be sung by the sisters. The *Lamentations*, as part of the liturgy of Holy Week, traditionally offered many musical opportunities including long melismas on the initial syllables, and additional Psalms and verses that would be sung.

The final chapter in this section defines Marian worship through music within the structure of the Compline service.

We order if not at all of the [monastic] hours specified, at least for the sinning of the Antiphon of the Virgin, all of the Sisters- those professed and the servants- should participate if they are not prevented by obligation. But when the Psalm *Qui habitat* begins, let the bell of the Infirmary be rung for the duration of a *De Profundis*; to whose sound as we said, all should show up in the Choir loft. On Sundays and specified feast days let two Novices, before the said Antiphon begins, after making profound bows at the Altar, will gather the lit *vite*, and moving together, and having made genuflections toward the Altar; they will retire one to the right and

the other to the left of the platform of the Altar: having finished the antiphon they shall say together the appropriate verset and the Choir will respond. While the said Antiphon is sung, the Reader or the Abbess, or the most senior according to the custom, shall give the blessed water beginning with the eldest ones and a Novice, or a Young Sister of the [Giovane] shall carry the little cup. Once the said antiphon is finished, the Novices will say the verset, and the Reader the Oration. When the [antiphon] *Regina Celi* is sung, let them all stay standing, one Choir facing the other.⁵⁰

The Office of the Madonna was of such importance that all of the community was required to attend and take part, even the *converse*. Although they had no active role, were required to attend. The novices, as part of their education, performed many of the acts of reverence such as bowing, genuflecting and flanking the altar while the most senior and revered members were charged with the readings. The whole choir of sisters sang the antiphons and verses; the only one made explicit is the singing of “Queen of Heaven,” an ancient Marian devotion (one of the four seasonal hymns) for the end of Vespers. The tasks undertaken by the youngest members of the community would have been overseen by older members, who perhaps were remembering their own experiences as novices and junior members; this ritual served as a bond of shared obligation and

⁵⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo Quarto: della Antifona della Madonna che si canta a Compieta, p.111.

... Ordiniamo che se non a tutta detta ora, almeno al cantare della Antifona della Madonna concorrino tutte le Mon[ach]e non necessariamente impedita, tanto velate, quanto Serventi. E pero quando si comincia il salmo Qui abitarsi suoni il campanello dell'Infermeria, per lo spazio di un De profundis al qual suono tutte come e detto comparischino al Coro. Nelle Domeniche, e feste comandate due Novizie, prima che si cominci detta Antifona fatta profonda inchinazione all'Altare, piglieranno le vite con facole accese, e accostarsi insieme, e fatta genuflessione in mezzo verso l'Altare si ri[ti]eranno una alla destra, e l'altra alla sinistra della predella dell'Altare: e finita l'antifona dichino unitamente il versetto che corre e il Coro ris[paada]. Mentre si canta la detta Antifona, l'Eddomadaria o la Bad[ess]a, o la più anziana secondo che usa, dia l'Acqua benedetta, cominciando dalle maggiori e una Novizia, o Giovane del [-] porti la sechiolina finita la detta antifona, le Novizie dichino il versetto, e l'Eddomadaria l'Orazione. Quando si canta la Regina Celi stieno tutte ritte con la faccia l'un Coro verso l'altro....

devotion passed down from generation to generation virtually unchanged because it relied on traditional plainchant rather than on the evolving styles of polyphony.

Ferial Sung Masses

The Constitution says relatively little about the *Messa Cantata* beyond listing the many festivals and special occasions for which the Mass was to be sung as discussed above. The Charter, however, dedicates three chapters to the subject. The disparity between the levels of apparent interest lies in the fact that the sung Mass required the active participation of the Order, but very little action on the part of the sisters. There are two chapters instructing the ways in which the Monsignor should sing the *Messa Pontificale*, including his disposition, punctual arrival, the order of activities and the proper way to genuflect and kneel before the Holy artifacts.⁵¹ In the instance that the Monsignor Prior is not able to sing the Mass himself, the Charter arranges for the Confessor or a Chaplain to do so with similar instructions.⁵² The sisters are not mentioned in these chapters— neither as participants nor as observers. As the Mass was conducted in a separate chapel from the sisters' cloistered chapel, their presence would not have been obvious, even though the ferial Mass was sung almost exclusively for their benefit. Perhaps the passages in the Constitution were written to illustrate the separation

⁵¹ ASPi 2878. Libro Terzo, Sessione terza, Capitolo 2. Monsig[nor]: canta la Messa Pontificale, e fa l'esposizione, p.369-72; and ASPi 2878. Libro Terzo, Sessione terza, Capitolo 7. Della desposizione del Santissimo nella quale Monsignore canta la Messa, p.383-85.

⁵² ASPi 2878. Capitolo IV: Della Messa cantata [per] Pressosizione dal Confessore, o da un Cappellano facendo l'esposizione Monsignor. p.380-83.

between the display of wealth and resources available and the restraint the sisters were to show in upholding the edicts of Tridentine reform.

Funerals

The sung Mass was quite common as indicated by the regular payments for *messa cantata* in the account books of the convent.⁵³ The second most common form of sung mass was the Requiem Mass. These can be divided into two categories, those for sisters who had recently died and remembrance masses celebrated annually.

The death of a sister was a solemn occasion in which the convent, the family and the Order commemorated the woman through simple remembrance vigils, elaborate Masses and even costly adornments for especially revered women such as those who had been abbess. The services began immediately after the sister's passing with musical offerings.

At the death of a sister, if it is daytime they will sound the *Ave Maria*, and the double-stroke of the bell as customary for her [position within the convent], if at night, wait until day: but as soon as she has passed away begin to say a Nocturne for the Dead with a *Miserere*, and the *Benedictus*, then two sisters shall begin [to recite] the Psalter, and they shall continue it in alternation, continuing as considered appropriate by the abbess.⁵⁴

⁵³ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605; Pezzo 33 Libro Giornale, 1637-1654; Pezzo 34, Libro Giornale 1654 al 1683; Pezzo 35, Libro Giornale 1683 al 1694.

⁵⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo quarantesimo nono: Del Transito delle Monache, p.152.

6. Morta che sia la sorella, se sarà di giorno so sonerà l'Ave Maria, e i doppi soliti per lei, se di notte, s'aspetti a giorno: ma subito spirata si cominci a dire un Nocturno de Morti con un Miserere, e il Benedicuts, poi due sorelle comincino il [P]slaterio, e lo proseguischino, succesiuamente scambiandosi, e cosi seguiterano quanto parrà alla M[adre] Bad[ess]a.

Large scale, formal prayers commenced in the days following the death with the funeral and Masses said or sung by the priests of the Order depending on the station of the departed. The Constitution establishes the appropriate services for many different scenarios in the chapter entitled “Of the Funerals, of the death of Sisters, and their Souls.”

For each Sister who dies there will be said thirty Masses... In the Refectory for thirty days continuously will be said in the morning, and in the evening the Canticle *Magnificat*. ... For the death of the Pope or the Archbishop of Florence, a plainchant Mass will be said by the Father Confessor for their spirit, and the Sisters in the Choir will say a Nocturne for the Dead. For the death of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Grand Master of the Order of Santo Stefano Pope and Martyr, and for the death of the Monsignor Prior of Pisa, and for the death of the Spiritual Father, the Sisters will sing the Office of the dead and the Mass and for each of these will be said a Nocturne of the Psalter in the Choir, the first day not impeded by other extraordinary circumstance.⁵⁵

Of significance in this passage is the incredible attention paid to the deaths of La Concezione’s superiors in comparison to the ecclesiastical hierarchy; the sung mass is reserved for those closest to the convent rather than for those whose relative importance existed outside the walls. Even more poignant, the death of a sister merited a much longer commitment of time and energy—thirty masses plus daily singing of the Magnificat for her soul. Familiar chants would have taken on new meaning when imparted on behalf of

⁵⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Cinquantesimo: Dell'Es[s]equie, delle Mon[ach]e morte, e loro Sufragi, p.154.
Per ciascuna Mon[ac]a che muore si farà dire un Trentesimo di Messe, ... In Refettorio per trenta giorni [cintinui] si [tra] mattina, e sera il Cantico Magnificat. ... Per la morte del Papa, e dell'Arcivescovo di Firenze, si farà dire una Messa piana al Padre Confessore per l'Anima loro, e le Mon[ach]e in Coro diranno un Notturmo de Morti. Per la morte del Gran Ducadi Toscana Gran Mastro della Religione di Santo Stefano Pape e Martire, e per la morte di Monsignor priore di Pisa, e per la morte del Padre spirituale, si canterà dalle Mon[ach]e l'Uff[izi]o de Morti e la Messa e per ciascuno di questi si dirà un Notturmo del Salterio in Coro, il primo giorno non impedito da altri aggravi straordinarij.

a community member and friend; remembering her through song would have been a powerful ritual and an experience that served to unite the community.

In addition to the masses commemorating the lives of sisters and important men, remembering Eleonora de Toledo was an essential event on the annual calendar for La Concezione. The foundress' memory was celebrated fourteen times between 1592 and 1604; most of these occurred in mid-December near the anniversary of her death, but a minority were celebrated at other times of the year— in 1598 she and Cosimo I were celebrated together in November instead of at the time of her death.⁵⁶ Each time, Eleonora was honored with at least one sung Mass, and often several “plain” Masses, as well as an extra allotment of valuable wax.

Feasts

The activities associated with commemorating Eleonora's death were primarily of interest to the convent, particularly in the seventeenth century when those who had known her in life were no longer alive; although the Medici court, particularly during the years of the female regency probably also commemorated her death, perhaps at La Concezione, the product of her last testament. The significance of other festivals, however, carried beyond the walls of the convent; the holy day celebrating the Conception would have been only one of many of religious festivals. The Constitution establishes the role that music played during these times. The week before Easter appears

⁵⁶ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605. f.114v.

9 Settembre 1598: A spese di sagr[esti]a /-uno [per] 1 messa cantata et 6 plane che la grande se cantata su in coro n[ost]ro che sono [per] il GranDuca Cosimo et la gran Duchessa Leonora.

to have been a time of heavy musical activity in the convent, as it was in other monastic communities. Special music was prepared by the sisters and extra musicians were hired, particularly for Thursday, Friday and Saturday as noted above.

On Thursday, the “washing of the feet” ceremony commenced in the convent. While this was not traditionally a musical occasion, two singers are instructed to sing “the customary words in the Missal” during the foot washing. The more formal services continued the special use of music with a sung Mass.

The Ecclesiastic Ceremony of the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday and the giving of the peace was instituted long ago and is a representation of the washing the feet of the Disciples by Jesus. It must be done with great devotion and humility by the Abbess, and if she is not able, by the Prioress. On Holy Thursday, before Matins, the latter, after having gathered the sisters in a pre-determined room having read first some devotional meditation about that mystery.

[The washing will begin] in the order [of seniority], while two singers sing the required words from the Missal and when the washing of the feet is finished, the Abbess will say the prayer that is appropriate. The giving of the *Pace* [an object symbolizing peace] is an ecclesiastical ceremony, which is customary not only among the Regulars, but also in the cathedral church [the Duomo]; during Sung Masses after the *Agnus Dei*, except for the Masses for the Dead, and the Masses for Thursday, Friday and Holy Saturday and this way the Sisters have to do [this] every time for sung masses, except for the above mentioned masses: for which sung masses once the *Agnus Dei* is said, two novices to which the task will be assigned by their Mistress, together bow reverently to the middle of the Altar, and standing at the pedestal [of the Altar] they will take from on top of the Altar the Peace, each girl the one belonging to her group, and that taken, and held above the bosom with the right hand, moving it to the left hand below the collar, newly reunited they stand at the middle of the pedestal. They will kneel, and having made said gesture of kneeling, they will separate, and she who is standing on the side of the residence of the Abbess will go to give the Peace to the Abbess, and successively to all of the others, at the same time, the other sister will go to give the Peace to the other Choir with the same order, and having finished giving it to all of the Sisters and Servants that shall have been there, the two will place

themselves kneeling before the middle of the pedestal of the Altar will give to each other the other's Peace so that she may kiss it, and having done this, they will return them to the top of the Altar, and return back to the Abbess. From the same place, they will kneel, and they will return to their places. In giving the peace they will say to each [sister], *Pax tecum* and each sister will respond, *Et cum spiritu tuo*.⁵⁷

This kind of pageantry was an important way the sisters marked the most special occasions; in re-enacting the motions of Christ as he washed his disciples' feet and the elaborate ceremony of giving the peace, the sisters performed acts of devotion with medieval roots. As Leonard Goldstein concludes, in the earliest medieval dramas, monastics enacted the last days of Christ and his rising as a means "to recreate the emotions that accompany the promise of salvation and give assurance of that salvation and in this way revitalize the waning faith."⁵⁸ The sisters would have been reminded of

⁵⁷ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo tretesimo settimo: Della lavanda de' Piedi nel Giovedi Santo e del dare la Pace, p.115.

Essendo questa Cirimonia Ecclesiastica istituita in memoria, e rappresentazione della lavanda che fece Giesu de piedi de suoi Discepoli, deve esser fatta con molta devozione, e umilta dalla M[adre] Bad[ess]a, e quella impedita dalla M[adre] Priora, la quale il Giovedi santo avanti il mattutino adunate le sorelle nella stanza a ciò destinata letto prima qualche devota meditazione sopra questo misterio, ... e seguitando per ordine, nel qual mentre, due Cantore canteranno le parole ordinate nel messale e finita la lavanda la M[adre] Bad[ess]a dirà l'orazione che si dice. I dare la Pace, e cirimonia Ecc[lesiastic]a, la quale usa non solo tra i Regular[e], ma anco nelle Chiese cattedrali, collegiate alle Messe Cantate doppo l'Agnus Dei, eccetto alle Messe de Defunti, e alle Messe del Giovedi, Venerdì, e Sabato Santo e così devono usare le Mon[ach]e ogni volta che si canta Messe, eccetto alle suddette Messe: alle quali Messe cantate detto l'Agnus Dei, due novizie alle quali sarà commesso dalla M[aest]re Maestra, fatta unitamente profonda riverenza all'Altare in mezzo, e a pie della predella piglieranno di su l'Altare la Pace ciascuna quella della sua banda, e quella presa, e posta sopra il petto con la mano destra, enendo al sinistra sotto lo scapulare, di nuovo unite a pie e in mezzo della predella faranno nuova inchinazione, e fatta detta inchinazione si spartiranno, e quella che e dalla parte della residenza della M[adre] Bad[ess]a, andrà a dar la sua pace alla M[adre] Bad[ess]a, e successivamente all'altre nel medesimo tempo andrà a darla all'altro Coro col medesimo ordine, e finito di darla a tutte le Mon[ach]e, e Serv[ent]i che vi fussero, postesi tutte due inginocchi nel mezzo della predella dell'Altare si daranno a ci baciare l'una la pace dell'altra, e fatto questo la rimetteranno in su l'Altare, e rivolte verso la M[adre] Bad[ess]a, dal medesimo luogo li faranno l'inchinazione, e se ne torneranno a lor luoghi nel dare la pace diranno a ciascuna, *Pax tecum* e ciascuna risponderà; *Et cum, spiritu tuo*.

⁵⁸ Leonard Goldstein, *The Origin of Medieval Drama* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 227.

their role in society as protectors of the city through prayer; their obligations to live chaste, obedient lives; and that there was a heavenly reward for their earthly sacrifice.

Elissa Weaver has argued in her book on theatrical performances in the convents of Tuscany that many communities of enclosed women wrote, acted and watched not only *sacra rappresentazione* but also spiritual comedies and secular works.⁵⁹ Liturgical dramas and their ceremony could be used as educational lessons for novices in teaching the ways of convent life, as devotional enrichment for the whole community, such as the recreations of the stories of saints, and as entertainment in the parlor for the sisters and their [female] guests. Weaver notes that many of the productions included staging, costumes and music—elements that were discouraged by the authorities but were essential to the sisters' enjoyment of the activity.

The use of music was not limited to the poignant pre-Easter services; the sisters of La Concezione also celebrated a special vigil at Christmas with music. As described in the Constitution,

The Antiphons that are said for the *Magnificat* for eight days before the Nativity of Our Lord: the first day it will be intoned by the Abbess, and the subsequent days by the most senior member handing it down to the next in order of rank, and the whole choir will respond singing, and so there is no confusion, the most senior Singer will give the sign by bowing her head to the one whose turn it is day by day to intone it as is done in other solemn festivities. On Christmas Vigil at Prime, the leader of the plainchant (la *Corista*), or the actual Liturgy Reader reads the (*Calenda*) with a loud voice and with great solemnity: and when it will be [the appropriate] time, she will go to the middle of the Choir, accompanied by two Novices that bring the lit candle and with all Sisters standing, read with a medium voice until the word marked in the Book of Martyrs then raise the voice as is noted here and at the word *Nativitas*, all should

⁵⁹ Weaver, *Convent Theatre*.

prostrate themselves, and remaining prostrate, they shall give thanks for God's immense goodness.⁶⁰

Taking turns leading the music of the Nativity services, the sisters acted out a well-established ritual of initiating the chant, reading by candle light and prostrating as a group. In contrast to the instructions given for Easter, the Christmas vigil specifies few particular pieces other than the *Magnificat*.

Monastic Rites

In addition to the many rituals common to Catholic churches across Europe, convents participated in exceptional rites specific to the monastic life. When a girl took the habit, often as an adolescent between the ages of twelve and sixteen, she underwent a spiritual transformation that also included a physical change; this "Initiation" ceremony marked the beginning of her novitiate, a term that lasted at least one year. At the age of sixteen, after at least a year of novitiate training in the ways of conventual life, the girl then took the three solemn vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the "Profession" ceremony making her a full, albeit junior, member of the community. While these two ceremonies made up the basic sequence of rites, and were probably similar across regions

⁶⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo tretesimo quinto: Dell'antifone maggiori, e della Calenda nella Vigilia del Natale, p.112.

L'Antifone che si dicono al'Magnificat per o[t]to giorni avanti al Natale di N[ostro] S[ignor] il primo giorno si intonerà dalla M[adre] Bad[ess]a, e i giorni susseguenti dalla maggiore di mano in mano per ordine, e il coro tutte le seguirà cantando, e acciò non nasca confusione la Cantora maggiore darà cenno con l'inchinazione della testa a quella a chi giorno per giorno, tocca a intonarla come si fa nell'altre festività solenni. La vigilia del Natale a Prima, la Corista del canto, o vero l'Eddomedaria legga la Calenda con voce altra e con maggior solennità: e quando sarà tempo verrà a mezza il Coro, accompagnata da due Novizie che porteranno le vite con le canele accese e stando tutte le Mon[ach]e in piedi, legga con voce mediocre sino alla parola segnata nel Martirologio poi alzi la voce come quivi è notato e alla parola Nativitas tutte si prostrino, e stando così prostrate, ringrazzino Dio di beneficio così immenso.

and Orders— individual convents and monasteries often extended the course of rituals to include consecration, investiture and induction ceremonies at different times of the year or in special recognition of the sisters. Many convents, particularly large, wealthy institutions, used this panoply of ceremonies to display their political power, affluent connections and spiritual authority to the community beyond their walls.⁶¹

Initiation

The Initiation rite at La Concezione was often a young girl's first exposure to the mysteries of the convent. Upon being approved by the Grand Duke, examined by the Order of Santo Stefano and accepted by the sisters of La Concezione, her family would bring her to the small exterior chapel where the official would conduct the ceremony during which she would declare her desire to enter the religious life, and exchange her secular garments for those of a religious; her hair would be cut and she would cross into the Choir where the sisters would be waiting for her. Across Catholic Europe, this ceremony was an elaborate display of pomp, color, symbolism and music; besides the actual ceremony, the initiation of a daughter typically included extensive festivities such as a banquet, gifts, a procession and musical and dramatic entertainment. The secular parallel to the initiation was the betrothal of a couple; in fact, the profession that followed was often called, and treated as, the marriage of a girl to Christ.⁶²

⁶¹ See Chapter Two for La Concezione's use of ceremony as a political device.

⁶² Silvia Evangelisti, "Wives, Widows, and Brides of Christ: Marriage and the Convent in the Historiography of Early Modern Italy," *Historical Journal* 43/1 (2000): 233-47; Gabriella Zarri, translated by trans. Anne Jacobson Schutte, "Ursula and Catherine: The Marriage of Virgins in the Sixteenth

The formal acceptance of a daughter into La Concezione was a series of small rituals culminating in *il vestimento*, the vestiture ceremony during which she received the habit. Its significance was paramount—made clear by the fact that both the Constitution and the Charter comment on the procedures and the music to be used.

The Constitution takes great care in detailing the steps preceding the event, including rules on what the girl may bring with her and when she may speak with her secular relatives.⁶³ During the ceremony, as the girl crosses over the threshold separating the exterior chapel from the cloister, the sisters, led by those in the choir, sing the *Magnificat* and other canticles as the girl repeats the *Pax Tecum* affirming her acquiescence to convent life.⁶⁴ It is significant that the most important part of the ceremony, the crossing, is magnified with music; she would have heard the voice of the priest and the silence of those in the chapel behind her while she moved towards high voices of her new sisters welcoming her.

The Charter, in contrast to the rather simple rules laid out in the Constitution, demonstrates the Order's dedication to detail by particularizing different kinds of ceremonies. For example, there is a ceremony for initiating one daughter by herself, as

Century,” in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 237-78.

⁶³ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Quatro: Dell'accettazione delle fanciulle tanto da Velarsi quanto per Serventi, p.14.

⁶⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Quatro: Dell'accettazione delle fanciulle tanto da Velarsi quanto per Serventi, p.14.

8. ... dove adunate le Mon[ach]e le Cantore, intuonino il Magnificat e mentre si canta il detto Cantico la fanciulla si accosti a ciascuna dicendo, Pax Tecum.

well as a separate one for two or more daughters.⁶⁵ The rituals are essentially the same, and from the perspective of the convent, there was little procedural difference, but the Charter takes great effort to ensure that any configuration could be conducted properly.⁶⁶

The Charter gives much more information than the Constitution concerning what music was to be sung and in what order. After invoking the Virgin Mary, Saints Stephen and Benedict, the priest blessed the vestments while antiphons were sung by the sisters and continued as the girl rose to her feet to go before the Monsignor to receive the garments. After the oration by the Monsignor

The sisters gathered in the chapel will immediately begin to sing the following Antiphon: *Tu es qui restitues [he]reditatem meam mihi*: Psalm 15...After the Hymn is intoned, let her kneel on a pillow placed there for her by the “cerimoniere”, and let her remain genuflected with all the Choir during the first strophe, which when finished, the Monsignor with all of the others stand up. When the Hymn is concluded, he shall follow by singing the verse as it stands, not adding the Alleluia even during Easter time... After the Monsignor puts down the Mitre... he intones the *Te Deum*, which is pre-intoned for him by two singers, and the Choir of Sisters follows his singing. When the said Hymn has been intoned, the novice sister makes a deep bow before the Monsignor, then she goes to give the kiss of peace first to the Abbess who stands up straight on the right side, after which she passes to the left, and passing in front of the Monsignor she bows, and gives the peace to the Vicaress, or the Prioress, and successively to all of the other sisters. When she has finished giving the peace, the novice returns before the Monsignor with the customary bows, let her pick up the candle and the Cross, having finished the Hymn, the Novice would set her self down on her knees, and sing: *Hec requies mea in seculum seculi hic habitato quonia[m] elegi ea[m]*. Having

⁶⁵ A common practice at La Concezione, many initiations and professions were held for groups of two to five girls, sometimes they are members of the same family but often they do not share a name or benefactor.

⁶⁶ ASPi 2878. Libro Primo, Sessione Prima, Del modo di dar l'Abito Religioso ad una Fanciulla sola. Della benedizione degli Abiti, e vestimenti della Fanciulla: Capitolo 5, p.22-44.
ASPi 2878. Libro Primo, Sessione Seconda, Capitolo 4: Ordine, che si tiene nel dar l'Abito Religiosa a più Fanciulle insieme, p.62-68.

received then the blessing, the Novice follows all of the other Sisters in pairs singing the *Magnificat* all together, as she joins into the Chapter.⁶⁷

The sisters begin by singing “it is thou that wilt restore my inheritance to me,” a significant passage to monastic women because when a girl left her family for the convent, she legally renounced any right to her familial status. In effect, she forfeited her inheritance from her mother and father’s estates except what was given to the church as her dowry, to which she was normally no longer entitled. The “inheritance” of the Psalm was suppose to remind the women (both the new members hearing the words, and the established sisters repeating them) that their monetary sacrifice in the earthly world would be compensated with a spiritual one.

The seriousness of the event was reinforced by the stern ruling that the Alleluia, with its vocal acrobatics and extended length, was not to be sung, even at times like Easter when it would otherwise be expected. In doing so, Santo Stefano was able to limit

⁶⁷ ASPi 2878. Libro Primo, Sessione Prima, Del modo di dar l'Abito Religioso ad una Fanciulla sola. Della benedizione degli Abiti, e vestimenti della Fanciulla: Capitolo 5, p.22-44.

Benedizione delle Vesti e Scapulari (e Cintura e Velo).

... Mentre si canta la detta Antifona la Fanciulla l'alzi in piedi, e vada a inginocchiarsi avanti a Mons[ignor]dal quale s'interrogli se vada alla Relig spontanemente ...

Dopo che Mons[ignor]averà finito la detta orazione si ponga a sedere e il Diacono gli mette la mistra, a il Coro subito comincia a cantare la seguente Antifona: Tu es qui restitues [he]reditatem meam mihi: salmo 15. ... Intonato l'Inno s'inginocchi sopra un quanciale postogli dal Cerimoniere, e stia genufless[a] con tutto il Coro tutta la prima strofa, qual finita, Mons[ignor]con tutti gli altri si rizzi, e terminato l'Inno dica cantando il seguente [ver]ssetto tal quale ne anco nel tempo pasquale s'aggiunga l'Alleluia se quanto segue.

... Dopo di che Mons[ignor]deposta la Mitra ... intuona il Te Deum, preintonatoglia da due cantori, e il Coro delle Monache lo seguiti cantando Intonato il detto Inno la Novizia fatta profonda riuserenta a Mons[ignor] va a dar la pace ad osculum prima alla Bad[ess]a che stà ritta dalla parte destra dopoi passa dalla sinistra, e nel passare d'avvanti a Monsignor Le fa' Reverenza, e da la pace alla Vicaria, o sia Priora, e successivamente a tutte l'altre Mon[ach]e.

[Ter]minato di dar la pace ritorn la Novizia d'avvanti a Mons[ignor]con le dovte riverenze ripigli la candela e il Crocifisso, e finito l'Inno la Novizia si ponga in ginocchinoni, e canti: Hec requies mea in seculum seculi hic habitato quonia[m] elegi ea[m].

... Riceuta adunque la benedizione la Novizia seguitata da tutte l'altre Mon[ach]e a coppia cantando nel medesimo tempo a con il Magnificat, se ne va in Capitolo, e nel passare d'avvanti a Mons[ignor] coppia ...

this traditional display of extravagance on the part of their virgin daughters. Having completed the physical gestures of acquiescence and obedience, and before joining the sisters in the *Magnificat*, the novice makes a sonic gesture by singing Psalm 131:15, “this is my rest for ever and ever: here will I dwell, for I have chosen it.” Her last act as a member of secular society is not to say goodbye to her family or to acknowledge the priest, or even to recognize her new community, it is to sing of her choice.

The Chapter describes the ceremony for the investiture of multiple girls at a time, again from the Charter; it is very similar but gives slightly different information about the music.

After the benediction, the Celebrant goes to the little window and with covered head [let him] call the novices to him by intoning the Antiphon *Veni Sponsa Christi*, which is continued by the sisters. While the said Antiphon is being sung the Daughters stand up, and they go to kneel before the Celebrant. [The Choir continues to sing antiphons]... Having finished, the Celebrant rises with head uncovered, and he alone standing should intone: *Veni creator Spiritus*. Having intoned the Hymn, let him kneel and remain genuflected with all the Choir singing the first strophe through the end; the Celebrant with the Choir rises, having ended the Hymn, let him say singing the following verset to which at the time of Easter should also be added the Alleluia, then follows *Emitte Spiritum tuum*... Immediately the Celebrant with head uncovered should intone the *Te Deum*, and the Sisters should follow him in singing... After this, the novices in pairs make the customary bow, they follow all of the other Sisters singing the *Magnificat* already being intoned by two, they go into the Chapter and this ends the function.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ ASPi 2878. Libro Pri[m]o, Sessione Seconda, Capitolo 4, Ordine, che si tiene nel dar l'Abito Religiosa a più Fanciulle insieme, p.62-68.

... Dopo la benedione il Celebrante va alla finestrella, e col capo coperto chiami Le Fanciulle a se con intonare l'Antifona "Veni Sponsa Christi." La quale si seguiti dal Coro. Mentre si canta la detta Antifona, le Fanciulle si rizzano, e vadano a inginocchiarsi avanti al Celebrante, ... (this pattern of singing the antiphons repeats several times from il Coro) ... Finito ciò il Cele[br]e si rizzi col capo scoperto, ed egli solo in piedi intuoni: Veni creator Spiritus. Intonato l'Inno sl'inginocchi, e stia geuflesso con tuto il Coro tutta la prima strofa, vale finite, il Cel[ebr]e con il Coro si rizzi, e terminato l'Inno dica cantando il seguente versetto al quale anco nel tempo Pasquale Saggiunga l'Alleluia se quanto segue Emitte Spiritum tuum ...

The antiphon calling the girls to the window is one of the hallmark pieces of female monasticism, “Come thou bride of Christ/ accept the crown/ which the Lord has prepared/ for you forever.”⁶⁹ The priest begins the monophonic antiphon and as it passes from a solo male voice to a chorus of female voices, the words take on new meaning. It is no longer a call to come forth—it is an externalization of the girl’s new identity within the community. This alternatim, male solo to female choir, with its changing meaning for the participants, continues as the Holy Spirit is invoked, the *Te Deum* and finally the *Magnificat* are sung; the latter appears to have belonged to female voices only. Curiously, the Alleluia is permitted here, whereas in the chapter detailing the same ceremony, but for one girl alone, the Alleluia is strictly prohibited.

Together, the Constitution and the two parts of the Charter present a more complete picture of the music officially required for the initiation ritual, even if at times they appear conflicting. Music played an important role in enhancing the religious significance of the investiture rite, in forging bonds between the new sister and those who would become her community, and by contributing to the personal value that she assigned the event.

Subito il Cel[ebr]e col capo scoperto intuoni il Te Deum, e le monache lo sequitino cantando. ... Dopo di ciò le Novizie ambedue in coppia fatta la solita revesenza, seguitate da tutte l'altre Monache cantando il *Magnificat* già da due di esse intuonato se ne vanno in Capitolo e così termina la funzione.

⁶⁹ Veni sponsa Christi/ Accipe coronam/ Quam tibi Dominus/ Praeparavit in aeternum. It is from the Medieval Litany of the Virgins.

Profession

The music used in the initiation ritual was very similar to the music used for the profession—the ceremony performed at least one year after the initiation that cemented the girl's vocation as a daughter of the church. Both the Constitution and the Charter comment on the music used in the rite.

In the Charter, the music for the ceremony for giving the veil and professing final vows falls under the protocol for visits by the Monsignor Prior to the convent. The following passage describes the ritual for many daughters to profess at once; in fact, most professions were conducted for groups of girls who had been novices for at least a year.

After the Prelate has sung the Preface he collects the Mitre, and while standing he calls the Virgins to come to receive the veil, intoning the following Antiphon which is sung by the Choir: *Veni electa mea, et ponam in te thronum meum, quia concupivit rex speciem tuam. V: Audi filia, et vide, et inclina aurem tuam.* After the Antiphon is intoned and while the Choir sings, the Priest sits, and when the Choir reprises the verset *Quia concupivit* the Virgins rise up all together in a circle and the first two, indicated as the most senior, having first bowed one to the other as they leave their place. When they are veiled and all returned to their places, standing in a circle, let them wait for the assistant nuns to fix their veils, and thus on their feet together they shall sing: *Posuit Signum in faciem meam, ut nullum p[ro]pter eum amatorem admittam.* After the above said Antiphon has been sung they shall remain standing with their heads bowed. Then the Priest shall rise, deposit the Mitre, and says toward the Virgins the verse *Dominus Vobiscum* and they respond *Et cum spiritus tuo.*⁷⁰

⁷⁰ ASPi 2878. Sessione seconda, Capitolo I, Venuta di Mons[ignor] Priore alla Chiesa, p.124. Capitolo IX: Modo di dar loro il Velo, p.174-78.

Dop[po] che il Prelato ha cantata la Prefazione ripiglia la Mitria, e stando in piedi chiama le Ver[gin]i che vengano a ricever il velo intonando l'Antifona seguente, l quale si canta dal Coro: Veni electa mea, et ponam in te thronum meum Qui[oe] concirpiu it Rex Speciem tuam. V: Audi Figliuola, et vide, et inclina aurem tuam Quia. Intonata l'Anti[fon]a, e mentre che il Coro la canta il Prelato sied, e quando il Coro ripiglia il uersetto Quia concupiu it le Ver[gin]i si rizzano tutt'assieme in corona e le prime due figurate [per]le più anziane fattasi prima l'un l'altra seambievol riverenza nell'atto di partirsi dal suo luogo ... Velate e tornate [-] a luoghi loro, stando in piedi in corona, aspettino che le Mon[ach]e Assistenti gli abbino

The antiphon sung by the Choir, “Come my chosen one, and I shall place you on my throne, for the King has set his desire on thy beauty. Listen daughter, see, and incline thine ear. Graciousness is poured out upon thy lips: therefore, God has blessed thee forever. Pay heed to thy fairness and thy beauty, prosper, go forth and reign” comes from Psalm 44 and the Song of Songs, and is laden with sexual overtones. As with many of the texts for the Litany of the Virgin and the Common of Virgins, the profession texts in particular lend themselves to sensuality—both sacred and profane—that would have been understood by early modern listeners as a complex set of sacrifices and rewards.

When their veils have been set properly, the initiates sing together from the *Passio* of Saint Agnes in the Sacrament for the Consecration of Virgins. The consecration was a medieval ritual that was officially not part of the monastic rites after the Council of Trent. No evidence exists to suggest that La Concezione ever held a consecration rite, as would be expected of an institution designed to be a model of post-Tridentine ethos. Instead, the passage is used in the profession ritual, to keep with the tradition of using the story of Saint Agnes, the patron saint of virgins, as part of the monastic ceremonies.

As described in the Introduction, La Concezione had two classes of sisters: the *velate* (also called *professe* or *coriste*), sisters who had taken or intended to take the veil in profession; and the *converse* or servant sisters, who took simple vows and lived under the same ecclesiastical law but were not entitled to privileges such as a vote or the

assetati i ueli, e cosi ritte, assieme cantino: Posuit Signum in faciem meam ut nullum p[raeter] eum amatores admittam. Cantata la sopra detta Ant.a rimangono ritte tenendo il capo basso. Allora il Prete si rizza, deposta La Mitria, e dice verso le Ver[gin]i Dominus Vobiscum Rx Et cum spiritus tuo.

opportunity to hold office; additionally, because they paid a smaller dowry, the converse performed most of the manual labor. Despite this clear delineation between the classes, converse at La Concezione did hold some social standing. Perhaps because even the servant class came from good families and were of legitimate birth, they often received the same musically rich initiation and funeral rites as the *velate*.⁷¹

As an additional sign of parity, the Constitution assigns the same rite of profession for both the *velate* novices and the *serventi*.

This function is worthy of being performed on a feast day of holy obligation, and thus it will be done as usual after the Mass, which will be sung with [polyphonic] music for the *velate*, and will be said in plainchant for the *serventi*, and when by some happenstance, or for accommodation of relatives or the Monastery, it becomes convenient to do it on a day of a half-holiday or ferial day or another day after Vespers that is not prohibited, but nonetheless it is forbidden to provide a “colazione” for the Musicians, Priests, or relatives of the daughter or others in whatever day or time.⁷²

Two significant points are made in this ruling. First, that the profession rite was so esteemed that it merited its intentional alignment with a holy day. The major feasts were already occasions for which music, and especially instruments and polyphony, were expected and even encouraged. Secondly, in establishing the reasons for which a ceremony might be moved, the wishes of the relatives are listed first, before those of the

⁷¹ ASF CRS 134 Pezzo 52, Filza Professioni e Funerali; Pezzo 53, Filza Professioni e Funerali; Pezzo 54, Filza Professioni e Funerali. Although not all members of the servant class were buried with a *Messa cantata*, many were so honored.

⁷² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152 Parte Prima, Capitolo Quinto: Del modo del dar l'Abito alle Novizie Velate e Serventi, p.20.

1. Questa funzione è degna di farsi in giorno di festa comandata, e cose si farà per ordinario doppo la Messa la quale, alle velate si canterà con musica, alle Serventi si dirà piana, E quando per qualche accidente, o per comodo de parenti o del Mona[ster]o fussi espediente il farlo in giorno di mezza festa, o feriale, o il giorno doppo vespro non si vieta, ma si bene si vieta il fare Colizione a Musici, a Preti o a parenti della fanciulla o a altri in qualunque giorno o tempo si facci.

monastery even; this could have included not only the presence of family members but also the availability of musicians hired by the family. Perhaps to counter this flexibility, there was to be no luncheon no matter the day or time chosen. Festivities including food, music and dramas were conventionally given by the family of the girl professing as a display of their wealth and status, similar to the manner in which secular marriages were celebrated. Hence, to state formally that there would be no such exhibition was a significant departure from tradition; it is however, in keeping with the limits on extravagance asserted by the Order.

Despite her family's grand fête, or lack thereof, the daughter entering La Concezione did not participate in any further activities with her family; rather, she continued the ceremony in the privacy of the cloister.

While conducting this function, all of the *velate* gather themselves in [the chapel] behind the curtains there accommodated; and they, when the Hymn *Te Deum laudamus*, is intoned, will retire, and everyone standing on their feet with the cocolle raised, and candles lit with Breviaries or Diurnal books in hand, and with eyes lowered they will continue to sing said Hymn in alternation. Meanwhile, the Bride will come around giving the Peace to each Sister bowing her head; having finished the giving of the Peace, the Priest with the Ministers will leave, and the door and the grate will be closed; and the Sisters will go in a procession to the Choir with the Bride; having finished the Hymn, they will say the prayers *Agimus tibi gratias*.⁷³

⁷³ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Quinto: Del modo del dar l'Abito alle Novizie Velate e Serventi, p.20.

6. Mentre si fa questa funzione, tutte le Mon[ach]e velate si aduneranno in detta stanze dreto alle cortine quivi accomodate; le quali all'intonare dell'Inno, Te Deum laudamus si titireranno, e stando tutte in piedi con le Cocolle in dosso, e candele accese con i Breviarj o Divini in mano, e con gli occhi bassi seguitaranno di cantare detto, Inno, alternativament, nel quale mentre la Sposa andrà attorno dando la Pace a ciaseuna Monacha col chinare la testa; finito il dare la Pace, il sacerdote con i Ministri si partiranno, si chiuderà detta porta, e la grata; e le Monache processionalmente andranno in Capitolo con la Sposa, dove finito l'Inno si diranno gli Orationi Agimus tibi gratias.

The pinnacle moment for the new girl would have been when she crossed the threshold—the priest, having finished the blessing, passed her from the exterior chapel to the interior as a father passed a daughter from his home to that of her husband. Her first duty as a “Bride” was to give the kiss of peace—the act of acceptance—followed by prayers and songs of praise to God from the Roman Breviary.

The Charter reinforces the basic outline of the profession rite put forth in the Constitution and provides an account of a specific occasion: a sung Mass for the profession of *converse* for the Princess Violante de’Medici.

At the Gradual, the castrato named *il Geri* sang a motet, and in the course of the Mass, that is to say, in the Offering and after the Communion, there were several *sinfonie*... the Sisters intoned at the same time the *Magnificat*.⁷⁴

Written in the margin of the page is *Sa'mie' Gaudens gaudebo in Domino*, the canticle “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,” from the Introit of the Mass for the Immaculate Conception, the passage is found in Isaiah 61.10. This entire section was written in 1729 as an addendum to the Charter. It is unclear whether this was a common practice performed regularly or if it was a special observance paid for by the families of the girls. Most likely, as the girls were *converse*, the castrato was hired by the Medici family.

⁷⁴ ASPi 2878. Libro Pri[m]o, Sessione Seconda, Capitolo 6. Vestimento d'una Conversa con l'interuento di S[erenissimo] A[ltezza] R[eale] e con Messa cantata, p.75-96.
16 Ottobre 1729 ... Al Graduale il Geri Musico cantò un mottetto, e nel tratto della Messa cioè all'Offertorio, e al post Comunio vi furono diverse sinfonie. ... le Monache intonorono nel medesimo tempo il Magnificat (in margin: Sa'mie' Gaudens, Gaudeboin Do[m]ino).

Officer Induction

In addition to the rites that established a girl as part of the formal community of a convent, other ceremonies were conducted as appropriate to the institution, the religious Order and the city. At La Concezione, one such occasion was the induction of a new abbess. The woman elected to this highest office was chosen by the voting sisters and sanctioned by the Order of Santo Stefano. Although there were many offices a sister could hold, only this one specifically has an induction ceremony detailed in the Constitution. Like the other important ceremonies of the convent, it included singing by the Choir:⁷⁵

[The Celebrant] intones the Hymn *Te Deum Laudamus*, in a singing style, which is continued by the sisters in alternatim; and in that while all of them, including the Novices and Servants, go in pairs by order of rank in order to render Obedience to the elected Abbess. After that Ceremony, when the Hymn is finished, the Monsignor Prior will say the verset *Confirma ho[c] Deus* and will be answered by the Sisters, *A templo sancto tuo*. He will say the Prayer *Actiones nostra*.⁷⁶

The passage is most likely describing the alternating style of two groups of singers. The following prayers are ones of supplication to do God's will (especially pertinent to the induction of a new abbess) and thanksgiving. The community, *professe* and *servante* alike, sing as they process and perform an act of obedience; this was probably a bow or a gesture of reverence similar in purpose to the kiss of peace.

⁷⁵ See Chapter Two for the political ramifications of electing an abbess at La Concezione.

⁷⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Quatro: Della Elezione della Madre Badessa, p.176.

...Fatto questo intuoni l'Inno Te Deum Laudamus, cantando, quale le Mon[ach]e proseguino a Coro alternativamente; e in quel mentre tutte etiam Novizie e Serventi vadino a Coppia per ordine di Ansianità a rendere Obbedienza alla Bad[ess]a eletta doppo la qual Cirimonia, e finito l'Inno suddetto Mons[ignor] Priore dirà il versetto Confirma ho Deus e risposto dalle Mon[ach]e. A templo sancto tuo dirà l'Orazione Actiones nostra.

Procession

In addition to the occasions during which an abbess was inducted, convents could bestow honor on a worthy person or event with processions. Often these were related to days of religious significance, although internal processions correlating to external festivities were likely occurrences as La Concezione was located in a popular quarter of Florence. It was next to the important Dominican monastery and church of Santa Maria Novella and along the route of many Florentine and Medicean civic processions.

Processions included pomp and pageantry as well as colorful costumes, decorations, extravagant feasts, additional worship services and dramatic and musical events designed to celebrate or memorialize.⁷⁷ It is not known to what extent the community of La Concezione took interest in processions outside their walls, although certainly as the “official” Medicean convent, they would have been privy to their occurrence through familial and political connections. However, the Constitution does relay some information concerning the Sisters’ participation in processions within the convent itself.

From the Sunday of Passion until Holy Thursday, each night they will make the same commemorative procession in memory of the life of Jesus to Calvary: and on Holy Thursday after the meal, they will accompany Jesus to the Trials. Every holy feast they will Process saying the Litany of the Saints and that of the Virgin Mary; and this latter one they will say every Saturday in the Chapel of the Nativity. Every first Sunday of the month they will solemnly make the procession of the Rosary, every

⁷⁷ Samuel Berner, “Florentine Society in the Late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Centuries,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 18 (1971): 203-46; Nicholas Howe, *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Modern Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007); Machtelt Israels, “Altars on the Street: The Wool Guild, the Carmelites and the Feast of Corpus Domini in Siena (1356-1456),” *Renaissance Studies* 20/2 (April 2006): 180-200; Christine Shaw, “Peace-making rituals in fifteenth-century Siena,” *Renaissance Studies* 20/2 (April 2006): 225-39.

second Sunday they will make [a procession] in honor of the Holy Conception of the Virgin Mary. On All Saints' Day they will make a Procession in which they will take all of the Relics of the Saints that are in the Monastery, singing the Litany of the Saints and ending with the *Te Deum laudamus*.⁷⁸

It is easy to imagine rows of women marching along stone corridors carrying candles, banners and holy artifacts, singing hymns or antiphons appropriate to the festival or the saint they were commemorating in order to make their trek more joyful, sorrowful or spiritual. However, as the only music mentioned is for All Saints' Day, such conclusions are only speculative.

The relics they may have carried included the arms of an unnamed "outspoken martyr," Saint Severo of the four crowned martyrs, Ipolito the Martyr, and Trofimo the martyr. La Concezione also housed the body of an unnamed "most joyful martyr," the head of a martyr named Giuliano, and one head from the company of Ursula and the 1100 Virgins. Their most prized devotional object may have been an unspecified relic of Santo Stefano— there was another relic of that saint in the Medici chapel of San Lorenzo, while his body remained in Pisa at the conventual church of the Order.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo nono: Dell'Orazione mentale, e d'altri esercizi Spirituali, p.122-24.

.... Dalla Domenica di Passione insino al Giovedì S[an]to inclusive, ogni sera faranno la stessa commemorazione processionalmente in memoria della vita di Giesu al Calvario: e il Giovedì Santo doppo la colizione accompagneranno Giesu a Tribuanli. Ogni festa comandata faranno Processione dicendo le Litanie de Santi, e quelle della Mad[donn]a quali della Ma[donn]a le diranno anco ogni sabato nella Cappella del Presepio. Ogni prima Dom[inic]a del mese faranno la Processione del Sa[antissi]mo Rosario solennemente, e ogni seconda Dom[inic]a del mese la faranno in onore della S[antissi]ma Conceptione di M[ari]a Verg[in]e. Il giorno d'Ognissanti faranno una Processione nella quale porteranno tutte le Reliquie de Santi che sono in Monao, cantando le Litanie de S[an]ti e in fine il Te Deum laudamus.

⁷⁹ Lodovico Antonio Giamboni, *Diario Sacro e Gida perpetua Per visitare le chiese della Città di Firenze, e suoi sobboghi in tutt' I giorni dell'Anno, e per sapere le feste, che vi si celebrano, l'Indulgenze perpetue che vi s'acquistano, e gl'Esercizi di devozione, e pietà che vi si fanno; Con una Notizia de'Corpi, e Reliquie di Santi, che in esse Chiese si confervano ed un Catalogo de SS.e BB.che in essa Città fioreirono,*

As part of everyday events and even more so during devotional practices such as processions, candles and wax played an important part in preparing and conducting rituals in the convent. As valuable commodities, their use was a signifier of the importance given to a ceremony. On the Purification (Candlemas, 2 February) the sisters were instructed by the Constitution to hold a “Procession of the Candles” lining the path for the resurrection of Christ with light and song.

On the day of the Purification of the Holy Virgin when all of the Sisters have communicated, they will come in order to the Communion window to receive the blessed Candles by the hand of the Spiritual Father, which he will pass them lit while they will sing the usual verses conforming to the Roman Missal, and they will go with the said lit candles in a processional to the Choir loft where they will end the said procession in honor of the Holy Virgin.⁸⁰

The candles for the entire year would be blessed by the priest at this time, as was the traditional purpose of Candlemas. The “hymns” may have come from those Biblical passages having to do with Christ as the light of the world, particularly relating to the presentation of the baby Jesus by Mary. This feast was also called the “Presentation of

ed altre Particolarità. Opera di Lodovico Antonio Giamboni dedicata all' eccellentiss. Sig Dottore Giulio Benedetto Lorenzini, (Firenze, Nella Stamp. D'Iacopo Giuducci 1700, con Lic[enza] de' Sup[uperiori].) Getty Research Institute 86-B20370.

Candido Martire, un Bracciò nella Concezzione in Via della scala, ... Felicissimo martire, il suo corpo è nella Santissima Concezzione in Via della Scala. ... Giuliano altro Martire, il suo Capo è nella Santissima Concezzione in Via della scala, ... Ipolito Martire, un suo Bracciò nella Concezzione in Via della scala, ... Orsola con Undicimila Vergini, e martiri sue compagne, ... mol'altr'Ossa, nella Concezzione in Via della Scala una Testa, ... Quattro Coronati martiri, altra Gamba di S[an] Severo nella Concezzione in Via della Scala, i loro corpi in Roma. ... Stefano Papa, e Martire delle sue Reliquie n'è in S[an] Lorenzo, nella Santissima Concezzione in Via della scala, il Corpo si conserva in Pisa assieme con la Cattedra Pontificale, ... Trofimo Martire, un Bracciò è nella Concezzione in Via della Scala.

⁸⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo sesto: Delle Processioni delle Candele, e delle Palme, e del' ricevere le Ceneri il primo di Quaresima, p.114.

Nel giorno della Purificazione della S[antissim]a Vergine comunicate tutte le Mon[ach]e verranno per ordine alla finestrella della Comunione a ricevere le Candele benedette per mano del Prete Spirituale, quale le porgerà loro accese mentre canteranno i soliti versi conforme al'Messale Romano, e andranno con dette Candele accese processionalmente in Coro dove termineranno la detta processione in onore della S[antissim]a Verg[in]e.

Jesus at the Temple”]; however, as the sisters chose to emphasize Mary’s personal ritual of purification after the birth, perhaps the sisters too were spiritually cleansed through the commemoration of the act.

In the same chapter in the Constitution, the “Procession of the Palms” is described.

On the day of the Palms they will receive also the blessed Olive Branches, and they will make a Procession in the same manner, and so the devotion may not be turned into a vain display as so often happens, we prohibit the Sisters from using date palms but only olive branches with which a knot or cross of palm, as is the custom, but they will not make it more elaborate. Then the first day of Lent after taking communion, they will receive the blessed ashes at the communion window by the hand of the Father Confessor singing the verses commanded by the Holy Church.⁸¹

It is significant that the Sisters are in effect reprimanded for the common practice of altering the ritual by using the wrong type of branch or misusing the religious objects. This is a reinforcement of the Order’s intention that the sisters of La Concezione must conduct themselves with the utmost gravity, though exactly what the abomination was remains unclear.

A special procession was conducted by and for the younger members of the community at the altar where they would sing hymns used frequently in other rituals and perform an un-described gesture of reverence. It appears that this was intended to be an

⁸¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo trentesimo sesto: Delle Processioni delle Candele, e delle Palme, e del' ricevere le Ceneri il primo di Quaresima, p.114.

... Nel giorno delle Palme ancora riceveranno l'Ulivo benedetto, e faranno la Processione nel la stessa maniera, e acciò la devozione non si converta in vanità come spesso succede, proibiamo che per le Mon[ach]e non faccino mai Palmizi ma solamente ulivi con qualche nodo o croce di palma, come si e usato, e non si accresea. Così il primo giorno di quaresima doppo comunicate riceveranno le ceneri benedette al finestrino della com.e, per mano del Prete Conf[esser]o cantando i versi ordinati da Santa Chiesa.

educational experience or a preparatory ritual to more complicated convent rites. Limited to the Novices who were in their year of training and the *Giovani*, the (young) sisters who had recently professed, the ritual of the *Ceroferarie* was modeled after some aspects of Compline, Vespers and the processions for saints under the watchful eye and assistance of the Abbess, and probably the *maestra delle novizie* as well. The young women were to imitate the processional and devotional practices of the *prima classe*, presumably the more senior members of the convent.

Of the Candle-bearers: This will be the task of the Novices or young professed sisters, in which they will take *le vite* to the Host in the manner that is described above in the Chapter on the Antiphon of the Virgin for Compline, and they do likewise for all the Processions, similarly in the solemnity of the first class to the end of the last Lessons they will go get *le vite* and having made a bow with them [first] towards the Altar, and then towards the Abbess, they should then come towards her and place themselves in front of her, one on the right side, the other to the left side of the Choir. And let them stay there until the end of the Hymn *Te Deum laudamus*, which when that is finished they will accompany the one who celebrates the office, who will go between them to say, *Deus in adiutorium meum intende* from Lauds. Having accompanied her back to her place bowing to her, let them bring back *le vite* to the Altar; and then after making a bow to the Altar and to the Abbess, let them return to their place. They should do the same in the Chapter of the Hymns of the Lauds, and of Vespers until the prayer is said, during the above-mentioned Feasts of the *prima classe*.⁸²

⁸² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo ventesimo quarto: delle Ceroferarie, p.228. Questo sarà Ufizio delle Novizie o Professe più Giovani, quali porteranno le vite alla Salve nel modo che di sopra nell Parte Prima si è ordinato, nel Capitolo dell'Antifona della Mad[onna] a Compia, e il medesimo faranno in tutte le Processioni, similmente nelle solennità di prima Classe al fine dell'ultime Lezzioni uadino per le Vite, e fatta con esse Reverenza all'Altare, e poi alla M[adre] Bad[essa] venghino verso di lei, e se li ponghino d'avanti una dalla parte destra, e l'altra dalla sinistra del Coro; e stieno quivi sino a che è finito l'Inno Te Deum laudamus, quale finito accompagneranno quella che fa l'Ufizio a quale andrà in mezzo a dire, Deus in adiutorium meum. Intende delle Laudi e raccompagnata al suo luogo fattali Reverenza riportino le vite all Altare; e di poi fatta Reverenza all'Altare, e alla M[adre] Bad[essa] ritornino a luoghi loro. Questo medesimo faranno al'Capitolo de gli Inni delle Laudi, e del Vespro sino a detto l'Orazione nelle dette Solennità di prima Classe.
NB: *le vite* may have been special candles or candles in special candleholders, or a similar devotional object appropriate to the altar.

The prayers beseech both God and Mary for their intercession, while the hymns that the young sisters sing are the common ones used in other rites so that they gain practice in singing them correctly. In this way, the youngest of the community are given the opportunity to lead, taking the kind of position all sisters would have been expected to assume during their own novitiate. This sense of shared experience and community strength is built in large part by the singing of plainsong. Working in unison, praying and crafting their spiritual identity through music, the sisters of La Concezione rose above the complexity of polyphony for the simplicity and clarity of plainchant.

The women of La Concezione used music in many different ways— while the primary function of their musical training was to sing the chants for the Mass, Daily Offices, and assorted rituals of monastic life, many of the enclosed women also probably performed on musical instruments and sang polyphony behind the walls of the cloister where they could not be heard by anyone. The Constitution and the Charter expound upon the importance of distinguishing between the angelic ‘brides of Christ’ who chanted, and the men who were hired to perform polyphony in the public church. The reason for the emphasis on this separation lies in the public image created by the Medici family and the Order of Santo Stefano, and the private reality of the convent. It is to this subject that the next chapter turns.

Chapter Five

Image Formation: Private versus Public Spaces

The residents of each early modern convent negotiated their “public” and “private” personae on a continually evolving basis. Many factors shaped both the internal and external ethos of a convent including the image the convent wished to project, the disposition of the superiors, the role of the local authorities, the level of engagement by prominent families, the physical construction of the buildings, and the assets and temperament of the inhabitants.

A convent, as an enclosed institution of female isolation, was necessarily apart from society, but it was also an element intricately situated within civil life. This paradox created a dichotomy of the “private,” a world in which women largely managed their own space and in-house matters as a microcosm of the outside world— and the “public,” the convent as seen by magistrates and secular people as a space which was not autonomous at all but rather heavily controlled by external (male) forces. Men represented the public face of the convent while women’s interactions were less publicly visible, but no less significant— a scenario common enough in secular life.¹ The residents of La Concezione managed their “private” and “public” roles to a single end—to maintain their status as the most selective and elite convent of the Florentine duchy.

¹ It is probable that the Grand Duchesses were influential ‘behind the scenes’ in moving the construction process forward, in securing the interest of families, and in interacting with the women of the convent.

The public's perception of La Concezione was largely created by Eleonora de Toledo through her testament, by Cosimo I and Ferdinando I through the construction and formation of the structure, and by the Order of Santo Stefano through their continued influence over financial, spiritual and practical matters. Numerous documents attest to the creation and existence of La Concezione as a Florentine institution, but few attest to the actuality of life inside the walls. Rather, it is the absence of otherwise common documents that helps shape a contemporary understanding of how women enclosed negotiated their lives as individuals, as members of families, and most significantly, as part of the sisterhood that constituted their daily existence.

Eleonora created a space designed to enhance the prestige of the Medici court as well as to secure her legacy. If she wished to be remembered as a patroness of sanctity, the benefactress of courtly virgins and a woman of wealth and status, then founding a convent under the strictest reform principles for only the most pedigreed inhabitants was the perfect vehicle through which to be memorialized. Her last testament projected the public persona of wealth and benevolence through which she wished to be remembered and it reflected the devout Catholic woman that she ostensibly was in private. Her husband, Duke Cosimo I, was instrumental in shaping the convent's public character through his choice of institutional location, building materials, and reinforcement of the burgeoning relationship with Santo Stefano. Their son Ferdinando I opened the convent with such festivities that the first showing of the new convent was at once elite and self-effacing; and the Order of Santo Stefano provided a gilded visage of the cloistered

inhabitants to the city and beyond. La Concezione was created to be the perfect convent—urban, wealthy, strictly controlled, and above all, pious.

Image Formation

Little can be gleaned from formal convent documents about the ways the women of the cloistered community understood their place in Florentine political and social networks. Certainly, they understood that living in La Concezione meant a life of prayer surrounded by a certain amount of patrician refinement. The women probably also understood that the public image of the convent was to remain pristine—free from the scandals, lengthy and frequent requests for exceptions, the stigma of forced monachization, and the flagrant disregard for papal reform that so often accompanied convents.² This does not speak to the private character of the community, however. Did the sisters uphold one ideal for the public and another behind closed doors? Without private records such as diaries and personal letters attesting to the matter, it is not possible to discern whether such disparity existed. It seems most logical that any attempt to create a truly reformed convent required a willing community of women.

The convent's inhabitants may have found something desirable about an institution founded on the highest ideals of the Catholic church—a convent for those truly desiring the spiritual life without the harshness of asceticism. The founders of La

² For comments on nun behavior, see Stanley Chojnacki, "Daughters and Oligarchs: Gender and the Early Renaissance State," in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London: Longman, 1998), 63-86 and Silvia Evangelisti, " "We Do Not Have it, and We Do Not Want It": Women, Power and Convent Reform in Florence," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34/3 (2003): 677-700.

Concezione had the rare opportunity to establish a convent that was above the folly of other convents; because it had no tradition of an old rite, no expectation of continuing to host lavish parties, no customary polyphonic practice and no ‘open’ community status to uphold, the community could establish itself as the model for a new type of convent, one that was morally superior and obedient to the Pope’s holy decrees. A few examples will serve to illustrate the ethos cultivated by the sisters and their superiors.

In the original rulebook, the number of sisters was limited to twenty, far smaller than other convents in Florence.³ This numeric limitation meant that few daughters would be accepted; the Grand Duke, as the final decision-maker, could then be quite particular in choosing the families on whom he would bestow this honor. The selective nature of the process bolstered the intended image that only the most elite and virtuous daughters would be admitted. It appears that La Concezione became so popular with noble families that as the number of supernumeraries increased, there was a need for additional servants in order to maintain the function of the house; as a result, by 1613 the number of acceptances of the combined classes was seventy—still far below the Florentine average.⁴

³ Gene A. Brucker, “Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imaginations in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 41-62.

⁴BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Secondo: Del numero dell Monache, e distinzione dell loro Classe, p.10.

1. Dal promo de Capitoli vecchi si uede che in questo Monastero fu assegnato il numero di venti Mon[ach]e da Coro, ma non però determinatamente; poi che vi è la particola; Almeno e dove tratta del numero delle Converse e lasciato a discrezione del Gran Maestro alimentarsi, la qual clausula e stata sempre intesa non tanto per le Serventi quanto per quelle da Coro, e però essendo il Mona[ster]o aumentato d'entrate, si aumentò notabilmente il numero delle Mon[ach]e e delle Serventi; si che l'anno 1613 trovandosi in numero Sessanta trà Velate e Serventi, e temendo le Monache che l'Entrate del Monastero non potessero alimentare maggior numero... 3 scudi i mese (per le Velate supernumerari) ...

One location in the convent where the public and private sectors came dangerously close was the external gate and the *ruota*, or the in-take wheel, through which goods passed from one side of the wall to the other. All outsiders approaching the convent, from priests and confessors to farmers and workmen, had to interact with the sister assigned to guard the convent.

Being that the doors and the grates of the Monastery are of the utmost importance to the assurance of the chastity of the Sisters, and for the honor of the monastery, it is necessary that the doors and grates be diligently protected and so for the safety of one and the other [i.e. the doors and the grates], they shall elect sisters of fifty years or older, of devout customs and seriousness, having fear of God and jealous of the honor of the Monastery, and who – as it says in the Rule in chapter 66 – shall know [how] to receive and deliver messages; and they shall have two assistants who shall serve at the *Ruota* ... and the other Door-guard shall remain with the two helping-companions at the Door to the Courtyard; those helpers should be elected when middle aged, that is, neither young nor old. And because the Door to the courtyard continues to the Parlor, these same door-guards shall serve as Wheelkeepers, that is, they will respond at the *Ruota* of the Parlor to the people outside; and in opening the Doors and calling the Sisters to the grates, they shall observe that which has been ordered in the above said Chapter of the Doors and Grates. And let it be known that the old Chapters were more strict; because they prohibited the door keeper to call any sister to any man whatsoever without showing the permission slip of the Vicar... Thus the old Chapters, in the abovementioned section, oblige the Abbess – when she is not in the *Coro* or in the Refectory – to remain with two sisters near the door of the cloister and the Parlor, and monitor who comes and goes, and what business they have. We urge for the last said Doorkeepers and Wheelkeepers that they shall not serve for this Office for the purpose of entertainment and for feeding their curiosity, but rather in order to guard the honor of God and the Monastery.⁵

Le Mon[ach]e Velate ... furono divise in tre Classi, cioè è Novizie, Giovani, e Mon[ach]e Velate, e la quarta classe quella delle Serventi ma per che l'esperienza insegnache la Gioventu per l'acquisto delle sante virtù a bisogno di più lungo reggimento è educazione spirituale...

⁵ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Quartodecimo: Delle Portinare, e Rotare del Monastero, p.211.

Essendo che le Porte e le grate del Mona[ster]o sono cosa importantissima per la custodia della Castità delle Mon[ach]e, e per l'onore del Mona[ster]o e necessario che le P[ort]e gr[ate] di quello sieno

Two or more sisters, of the appropriate age and disposition, guarded the intake of people and goods; they were also responsible for evaluating visitors, and their intentions. Like a floodgate, the Doorkeeper and the Wheelkeeper controlled the influx of secular influence—their job was to guard zealously the honor, and the privacy, of the convent.

This passage refers to the “old chapters,” implying that the extant Rule is a revision. In fact, it is a copy of a revision. The original rule of 1592, though it may have been sparse, has been lost, as has the 1650 revision. The extant Rule is a copy of the 1655 version with revisions added at the end dated from 1752 and a page insert in the beginning from 1814. The binding and cover indicate that it was bound in the nineteenth century. The sisters are reminded not to complain about the policies because the old rules were much stricter. This reinforces the thesis that La Concezione was founded to reflect the stringent reform policies of the late sixteenth century.

Lastly, the Constitution was presented publicly by the Prior, which may indicate that he presented it to the Abbess in a ceremony attended by invited guests or that it was

diligentemente custodite e pero a custodia dell'une, e dell'altre, si elegghino Mon[ach]e da cinquanta anni in su di Costumi Religiosi e gravi, timorate di Dio e gelose dell'onore del Mona[ster]o, e che come dice la Reg[ol]a nel Capitolo 66 sappino ricevere e rendere l'ambasciate; e abbino due aiutrici che servino per Ruotaie ... e l'altra Portinara rimanga con le due Compagne autrici alla P[orta] del Cortile; le quali autrici si elegghino di mezza età cioè ne Giovani ne vecchie. E per che la P[orte] del C[oro] e contigua al Parlatorio queste stesse Portinare serviranno di Ruotaie cioè per rispondere alle Ruote del Parlatorio alle persone di fuori, e nell'aprire le P[orte], e nel chiamare le Mon[ach]e alle grate osseruno quanto sopra sie ordinato nel suddetto Capitolo delle p[ort]e g[rate]e sappino che i Capitoli Vecchi erano molto più stretti; poi che proibiscono alle Portinare chiamare alcuna Mon[ac]a a uomo alcuno se non mostrava la Lic[enz]a sottoscritta dal Vicario, ... Perciò i Capitoli vecchi nel luogo citato impongono alla M[adre] Bad[ess]a che quando ella e fuori di Coro, o di ref[ectori]o stia con due suore vicino la P[orta] della Clausura e al Parlatorio, e veda chi va e viene, e ciò che si tratta. Esortiamo per ultimo dette Portinare, e Rotaie che non si servino di questo Ufizio per occasione di svagamento, e per nutrimento di curiosità, ma per zelare l'onore di Dio e del Mona[ster]o.

made known to the public in some way. Perhaps it was circulated at court— most certainly, the document was read by the Cavalieri.

I, Filippo Magalotti, Prior of the Conventual Church of Pisa of the Illustrious Religious of Santo Stefano, Pope and Martyr, approve and publish these Constitutions to all of the revered professed sisters who presently reside in the Monastery of the *Santissima Concezione* of Florence; and by the authority given to me by his Holiness Pope Clement VIII of blessed memory through the bull of the Foundation of the Monastery, I impose on them its observance this 3rd of October, 1655. [Signed] Filippo Magalotti the abovementioned in his own hand.⁶

In reinforcing the connection to the founding Pope, Clement VIII, the Prior asserts the Pope's role as an advocate of reform and a protector of Florentine virtue. Although the reform movement had long ago lost momentum, La Concezione seems to be—or at least is presented as—holding firm to the ideals of the reformers.

The Superiors

Of all of the factors that influenced the convent's public image, its superiors were of the utmost importance because they represented the convent in public matters including publicity, legal and financial matters and served as its civic representatives. La Concezione was a singular institution in that a state-sponsored organization, the military order of courtly knights in Pisa, the *Cavalieri di Santo Stefano*, acted as benefactor, magistrate and spiritual guide. The Order benefited from Florence's positive reception of

⁶ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, p.230.

Io Filippo Magalotti, Priore della Chiesa Conventuale di Pisa dell'Ill[ustrissi]ma Religione di S[anto] Stefano Papa, e Martire, Approvo, e publico le presenti Constituzioni, a tutte le Rev[eren]de Monache Professe velate che al presente si ritrovano nel Mona[ster]o della Sant[issi]ma Concez[i]o[n]e di Firenze, e per l'autorita concessami dalla Santita di Papa Clemente Ottavo di F[elice] M[emoria] nella Bolla della Fondazione di D[ivin]o Mona[ster]o, ne impongo l'osservanza, questo di 3 Ottobre 1655. Filippo Magalotti soprad[ett]o M[a]no propria.

La Concezione as part of the civic structure of the community, just as La Concezione benefited from Pisa's acceptance of the Order of Cavalieri because of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between convent and superiors.

One significant and public role played by a convent's superiors, in this case, the Cavalieri, was conducting visitations of the cloister in accordance with the reform policies of the *Sacra Congregazione dei Vescovi e Regolari*. This post-Tridentine body was charged with overseeing monastic institutions, particularly addressing the enforcement of reforms established during the sixteenth century. It appears that no report concerning the visitations to La Concezione was recorded in convent documents, although an official visitation was probably cause for some excitement and may have piqued the interest of family members and neighbors, as well as the sisters who prepared their private space to become public, if only temporarily.

The visitation of La Concezione was apparently quite an elaborate production; documents indicate that in 1642, the event included a prestigious list of Cavalieri, Senatori, members of the Medici family and Operai.⁷ The convent prepared for the visitation by lavishly ornamenting the Great Altar with gold and fabrics of many colors as well as works of art.⁸ Additionally, the month before the visitation saw the addition of the

⁷ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 44. 21 Lug 1642: Relazione della Visita.

"Operai," in this case, refer to bureaucrats who were charged by the duke with oversight of convents and monasteries rather than to laborers.

⁸ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 33 Libro Giornale, 1637-1654, f.32v.

2 Apr 1642: A spese di Chiesa /-ventinove di m.ta 31.8.4 pag[a]ti [per] ogni resto di [scudi] di 43.9.8.4 che tanti [sj] sono spesi nel Baldachino fatto sopra l'Altare grande di n[ost]ra Chiesa con due mute di Diappelloni una di Velluto turchino e Brocchabello bianco e dovè e l'altro dipinto a fiori disegnato dipinto messo a oro frangie e cucito t[utt]o in n[ost]ro Monast[er]o e de sud[dett]i danari [si] e pag.to [scudi] di 8.2 a M[aest]ro Piero Cambi Leg.lo [per] sue fatture e legniam[e] [scudi] di 2.2 a M[aest]ro Matteo francini

dowry of Violanta, daughter of the prominent Piccolomini family, certainly a public sign that the convent was in excellent spiritual and financial health.⁹ If the visitation was anything more than a formality, it was not ascribed to paper—there were no reprimands or admonishments from this or any other visitation.¹⁰ Perhaps corrections were made privately so as not to incur any black mark against the pristine image of the convent.

One of the major responsibilities of the Order was to provide the confessor for the sisters. This very private relationship was significant to the penitent-sister as the confessor was probably the only male to whom she had regular one-on-one access, and to the confessor because a nun had special spiritual qualities; her powerful relationship with God and the heavens was one that the Order would have wanted to supervise. In the course of this relationship, the private space controlled by women overlapped with the Order's external control of the public perception. A cloistered woman required a confessor to administrate her spiritual needs; moving to the physical limit of the enclosure, she sought consolation and absolution from a man who came to her sphere of influence in order to speak in relative privacy.

Authorities, secular and ecclesiastic, but particularly the latter, frequently stated their concerns that the confessor was the weakest link in a monastic woman's life. Local officials tried to set restrictions on the influence of confessors by limiting gifts given and

Magniano [per] ferri et [scudi] di 8.4.4.8 [per] oro, Colori, colle, tagliat.ra de primi drappelloni di drappo e alre cose minute.

⁹ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 33 Libro Giornale, 1637-1654, f.35v.

26 Giu 1642: A Ent.a di Dote /-settantacingue di m.ta 3 dal sud[dett]o Monte [per] i frutti delli [scudi] di 3000 della Violanti Piccolomini [per] un semestre decorso sino li 15 del p'nte levo e reco i sopra nominati contanti.

¹⁰ There may have been several visitations over the years although accounts of them are not extant.

received, by regulating how, when and where a woman could confess, by occasionally rotating or changing the confessor, by periodically requiring an ‘extraordinary’ confessor to ensure that the woman was receiving proper care, and by overseeing how her spirituality was presented to the public. Such ‘oversight’ might include the supervision of any printed accounts of her mysticism, extolling any saintly attributes she exhibited and the manufacturing of information about women that were unseen but still understood to be important. The confessor-penitent relationship was one reason that local officials tried to exert increased control over convents, not only during the Catholic Reformation era, but before and after as well.¹¹

Local Authorities

Beyond the role of the superiors, local authorities and even ecclesiastical authorities such as the bishop, archbishop, and up to the pope were theoretically imperative to the formation of a convent’s public sphere. These outside forces had an impact on the community’s perception of the convent through requests granted or denied, special dispensations, formal laws handed down, informal obligations and representation of interests in social and legal matters such as property holdings, taxes and participation in civic events. Whereas in most cities, both the local governance and the local ecclesiastical officials had overlapping influence over the convent, La Concezione only

¹¹ The issues of concern included sexual misconduct, sisters becoming too fond of a particular confessor, the mis-representation of a mystic and many other complaints both large and small. Alison Weber notes that abbesses and prioresses had concerns as well; she refers to a Carmelite house in Seville and a “perniciously symbiotic confessor/penitent relationship” (141). Alison Weber, “Spiritual Administration: Gender and Discernment in the Carmelite Reform,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31/1, Special Edition: Gender in Early Modern Europe (Spring 2000): 123-146.

had to contend with Santo Stefano. As stated in Chapter Two, much of the Florentine court was part of the Order, the *deputati* and *operai* assigned to govern convent matters were *cavalieri*, and few issues appear to have superseded the Order's hierarchy.

The local authorities, primarily the archbishop, did print decrees that were applicable to all city convents. These included reminders against such sins as vanity, material goods (including a ban on lap dogs), admitting girls before the age mandated by the Council of Trent, and breaking clausura. Two sets of decrees from 1619 were printed together.¹² This public statement of rectification was law that the *operai*, *deputati* and superiors of the various convents were supposed to enforce; it is worth considering that because La Concezione was so closely guarded by the Order and had very little contact with entities outside that organization, the blanket decrees of the archbishop may not have been intended for them. In general, it can be discerned that prohibitions like these were (re)stated because they were not being followed; however, no documentation supports the notion that the reprimands were directed because of infractions at La Concezione.

The decrees, whether they were directed at La Concezione or not, were probably read by the sisters in any case; a few of them give an indication of the intersection of the private and public spheres that are the subject of this chapter.

The rules or constitutions shall be read many times a year publicly, in a manner that all of the sisters shall hear them; do not let them be kept so

¹² BNCF Coll Magli.10.5.17/b.

Raccolta di alcune cose appartenenti alle Monache. Stabilite nel sinodo diocesano fatto in Firenze 14-15 Maggio 1619. Per ordine del Ill[usstri]ss e reverendiss[imo] Alessandro Marzi Medici Arcivescovo di Firenze.

hidden that they might not be seen, read, and re-copied at will by any sister at her pleasure, since it is not possible to observe that which is not known.¹³

The ruling places the onus on the sisters themselves for knowing the rules and following them; presumably this was inserted to supersede any complaints about the unjust application of rules. If the inhabitants knew the rules, perhaps they would complain less about them, particularly ones that restricted their interactions with outsiders. One such law requires sisters to refrain from spending time at the convent gates socializing; specifically, they were not to stand close enough to be able to speak or dine with relatives.¹⁴ Another states that letters not approved or not appropriate mandated harsh punishments: “those that will write or will receive letters without authorization will do eight [days of] penance and if those letters turn out to be inappropriate for the status of the religious woman, they will be punished more gravely.”¹⁵ Perhaps it was the (potentially) secular nature of the material that so offended local officials. The limitations of privacy required by secular authorities did not end with letters and gifts passed through the ruota; should contraband find its way into the convent, a second safeguard was in place.

¹³ BNCF Coll Magli.10.5.17/b.

11. Le regole, o costituzioni più volte l'anno si legghino pubblicamente, in modo che tutte le monache le sentino, ne si tenghino talmente occulte, & riposte che non possino da qualsivoglia monacha essere viste, lette, & ricopiate a suo piacere non si potendo osservare quello che non si sà.

¹⁴ BNCF Coll Magli.10.5.17/b.

24. Alle porte de mona[aster]i ne si mangi, ne si parli ancora con parenti strettissimi tanto done, quanto huomini sotto pena di no potere andare a parlare a forestieri per otto giorni per la prima volta, per la seconda per vn mese, e per la terza sotto pena di perdere la voce attiva & passua, & le Sup[er]ior[e] che daranno licenzia di parlarui o mangiarui o che chiuderano gl'occhi faranno deposte ad arbitrio dell'Ordinario.

¹⁵ BNCF Coll Magli.10.5.17/b.

21. Quelle che scriveranno, o riceveranno lettere senza licenzia faranno otto di penitenza, & se quelle lettere saranno poco convenienti allo [sta]to di persona religiosa, saranno punite più gravemente.

Once a year, the Abbess of the monastery, together with discreet [senior sisters] shall visit all of the cells, rooms and allotments of the sisters—boxes, closets, chests, and similar places ensuring that all shall have that which they need and that they do not have private or superfluous things, or things that are not appropriate to their status.¹⁶

The archbishop's decrees are not all aimed at limiting the actions or belongings of the sisters. One decree in particular was designed to protect the sisters from attack or suspicious activity: "while the confessors or other Priests are inside the Monasteries, let them not stay in the cells, or in whichever other place with the door closed, rather they shall keep it always wide open, otherwise as a result they will be excommunicated and suspended [from their position]."¹⁷

Rules established by the archbishop primarily affected the lives of the sisters who were supposed to abide by them, and the superiors (to a lesser extent). However, the family members on the other side of the wall were greatly impacted by changes or the enforcement of certain rules. What may have been the social habit of one family, for example to visit their daughter for lunch once a week, would have been necessarily curtailed by law. Family members had significant influence over how convents operated because certain families may have been courted to send their daughters to one convent over another, they also contributed to the financial status of the convent through the

¹⁶ BNCF Coll Magli.10.5.17/b.

14. Una volta l'anno la superiora del mon[aster]o insieme con le discrete visitino tutte le celle, stanze, & stanzini delle Mon[ach]e, casse, armadi, forzieri, e simili procurando che tutte habbino quel che gli fa bisogno, & che non habbino cosa propria, o superflua, o che al grado loro non convenga.

¹⁷ BNCF Coll Magli.10.5.17/b.

37. Mentre che li confessori, o altri Sacerdoti saranno dentro a mona[aster]ii [non] stiano ne in celle, ne in qualsivoglia altro luogo con le porte chiuse, ma le tenghino sempre mai spalancate, altrimentri siano ipso facto scomunicati, e sospesi.

dowry system, and in the case of wealthy families, some family members would have been on the local councils and judicial courts that made and enforced the rules.

Prominent Families

Little is known about women's interactions with their family members once they entered La Concezione because no personal records have been uncovered and the documents ruling daily life, the Constitution and the Charter, strictly limit the contact women had with the outside world.¹⁸ Contact with men was particularly guarded: only the closest male relatives—a father or brothers—were allowed to speak with their kin inside the walls. Female relatives, on the other hand, had more access to their sisters, aunts and cousins. At many convents, it is known that the parlor was a meeting place for visits, meals and even plays with music.¹⁹ The Abbess, as the most public figure of the convent, was responsible for the atmosphere of the parlor; indecorous activity, either on the part of the sisters or on the part of the visitors, was considered a failure on her part. The Constitution mandates several rules that were to be enforced by the Abbess, including requiring sisters to ask for a license to be granted before a visit to the parlor, the

¹⁸ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Vendecimo: Della Clausura, e Porte del Monasterio, p.45; Capitolo duodecimo: Delle Grate del Parlatorio, p.53; Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55; Parte Seconda, Capitolo Quartodecimo: Delle Portinare, e Rotare del Monastero, p.211.

¹⁹ This was a common problem in convents, as witnessed by the number of reprimands. It is also one of the most frequently mentioned spaces of activity by contemporary researchers.

physical properties of the space, an officer to keep watch on activities, and a warning not to ignore lascivious behavior or contraband.²⁰

The usual format for a convent parlor was a large room divided by an iron grate, sometimes two; outsiders could enter from an external door and the enclosed woman would come from the side connected to the cloister. There could also be a *ruota*, through which objects such as gifts could be passed. At La Concezione, no meeting was completely private; a designated sister was assigned to accompany the visited woman, she was called the *ascoltatrice*— the listener.²¹ This speaks to concepts of privacy versus decorum; the Order was clearly concerned with ensuring that the sisters acted in accordance with their image of purity and that no harm came to the sisters or the convent through the ‘dangerous’ space of the parlor where the secular and the sacred met. To separate the two divergent worlds, control of the grate and wheel prevented contraband from entering as well as protecting convent assets from exiting, and the accompanying sister prevented gossip or indecent speech from corrupting the air of moral superiority held by the convent body. As the Constitution makes clear, even the mere perception of impropriety was avoided through the security provided by these measures.

1. Having at the Parlor sufficient grates for the number of Sisters, we prohibit the creation of more grates than those which are present both in the Church and in the Parlor, or in whichever other place of the Monastery [grates are used]. And we want that all of the grates shall be maintained with double iron bars, and thick[ly meshed] as they have been up to the present, with the black cloth that covers all of the grate inserted through

²⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55.

²¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55-56.

the iron bars, [on the side of] the group of Sisters in a manner that it can be pulled across, or fastened to the last iron bar over the grate.

2. At Lent and Advent, for the ten days that pass from the Ascension to the Holy Spirit, and the ten days that follow Our Lady of the Snow to the Assumption of the Holy Virgin there will be kept at the grate of the Parlor the frames of double black cloth, as [it has been] it has been the custom up to the present [day]. We want that the order be followed/observed not to go to the grates on Sundays and feast commanded, nor Lent, Advent, nor the vigils under the law... of such days let there always be a list in the [outside of the] Parlor on a tablet that should be visible to anyone who enters, so that this order be known to those people on the outside.²²

Keeping the cloister private, even to family members in the parlor, was of importance to the authors; a visitor's log, double bars and cloths insured extra protection from the secular world, but it did not exclude additional forms of contact, particularly for the wealthy daughters of La Concezione.

Most of the women of La Concezione received regular stipends beyond the spiritual dowry that went to the church; this was an unusual arrangement as most female monastics depended on their families to procure personal articles for them and as Craig Monson observed "in the absence of disposable income of their own, nuns also relied

²² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo duodecimo: Delle Grate del Parlatorio, p.53.

1. Avendo il Parlatorio Grate sufficienti al numero delle Mon[ach]e, proibiamo il fare più grate di quelle ci sono di presente tanto in Chiesa, quanto in Parlatorio, o in qualunque altro luogo del Mona[ster]o. E vogliamo, che tutte le grate si mantenghino così doppie di ferri, e fitte come sono state sino al presente, con la tela nera che cuopra tutta la grata dalla banda delle Mon[ach]e infilata ne ferri, in modo che possa scorrere, o vero fermata nell'ultimo ferro di sopra la grata.

2. La Quaresima grande, l'Avvento, li dieci giorni che scronno dall'Ascensione allo Spirito Santo, e li [X] giorni che scronno dalla Madonna della Neve all'Assunzione della San[tissi]ma Vergine siterranno alle grate del Parlatorio i telai di tela nera doppia, come sino al presente si è usato. Vogliamo che si osservi l'ordine di non andare alle grate nelle Domeniche e feste comandate, ne la Quaresima, nell'Avvento, ne le vigilie di precetto... de quali giorni se ne tenga sempre nota in Parlatorio in una tavoletta patente a chiunque vi entra, acciò questa ordinazione sia nota alle persone di fuori.

upon their brothers as patrons of convent music.”²³ At La Concezione, parents, and occasionally guardians such as brothers, uncles or friends, sent money and gifts that were formally recorded in convent account books— often these appear at major feasts such as Easter and Christmas but entries for these *mancie*, rewards or tips, can be found throughout the year.²⁴ It is unclear what happened to the money— why was it recorded by the Abbess if it was not part of the financial structure of the convent? If it was part of the convent finances, why was it given to specific women?

Most of the women received some gifts of this sort— although a few women more than others; does this indicate that there were personal expenditure accounts or that special personal belongings were allowed? Perhaps this was the case, at least covertly. These gifts were voluntary because beyond the amount given as the dowry, women who took the religious habit were not entitled to additional financial benefits under the law. Three contrasting theories are plausible: first, the money was used to strengthen the community position as a whole— better food, furnishings, new devotional materials (books, art works, music, altars, etc.) and additional property holdings are some examples of items that could have been purchased with the pooled monies. Secondly, the money was given to the girls as recompense for having been sent to a religious vocation they may not have chosen, a sort of ‘hush-money.’ Colleen Reardon notes an instance in

²³ Craig A. Monson, “Families, Convents, Music: The Power of Sisterhood,” in *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others*, eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.48.

²⁴ For example, AFS CRS 134, Pezzo 33 Libro Giornale, 1637-1654, f.30v.

22 Gen 1641: A Ent[rat]a Straord[inari]a /-trentotto di m.ta 35.13.4 che [scudi] di 20.15.13.4 aiuti [per] mancie più monache nella passata Pasqua da loro parenti [scudi] di 12 aiuti S[uor] francesca Eletta della sua Cog.ta Sposa [per] mancia e [scudi] di 6 S[uor] M[ari]a Teresa dalla Sposa di un suo Cugino [per] mancia.

which music lessons were given to a girl unhappy with convent life as a form of appeasement.²⁵ Perhaps La Concezione families were using a similar approach—small monetary gifts kept daughters happy and maintained peace. In return, the women could have spent the small amounts on items that could be sent as gifts to people outside the convent to whom the daughters wished to show favor. For example, there was a package sent to Maria de Medici, Queen of France, of candied almonds, and a devotional image of the Virgin was sent by Maria Cristina to her aunt Caterina de Medici.²⁶ Sending a gift was an important (public) way in which individuals began or reinforced a relationship with family members or people in a position of power, such as a potential patron.²⁷ Thirdly, the money may have been given to the women so that they might spend it individually on goods appropriate to their class.²⁸ This would have had several affects on the pubic and private spheres. As La Concezione was known as a wealthy institution for the daughters of the most elite families, it would be expected for them to dress, eat and furnish themselves accordingly, maintaining the level of fineries would have been good for the convent's retention and recruitment of new members as well as reflecting their

²⁵ Colleen Reardon. "The Good Mother, the Reluctant Daughter, and the Convent: A Case of Musical Persuasion," In *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin LaMay, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 271-86.

²⁶ ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.136v.

23 Settembre 1600: A spese gen[era]le [lire] venti und. 4 che [lire] 4.4 [per] libro 12 di mandorle il resto [per] il.e 12 di zuchero [per] presentare la Principessa Maria oggi, Regina di francia d[a] Cardinalo Aldob[randin]i e qualcaltro benofat[to]re.

ASF MP 6108, f.917. Documentary Sources for the Arts and Humanities The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP ID 6708, 1629/01/13.

²⁷ Silvia Evangelisti, "Monastic Poverty and Material Culture in Early Modern Italian Convents," *Historical Journal* 47/1 (2004): 1-20.

²⁸ This supposition is by no means assured because as stated above, the sisters were not permitted private property; hence, either receiving goods as gifts or purchased from personal funds, would have required discretion.

personal and family status; and it had the added benefit of not costing the convent anything so that the institution might continue to be perceived as demure, obedient and above earthly commodities, even while their members were made comfortable. A gift to a woman in the Medicean convent probably had an additional advantage to the donor—it was a good way to curry favor with the Medici and indicated the family’s commitment to the mission of La Concezione.

In addition to such material contributions, family members could also represent individual sisters in the public arena, just as the superiors and local authorities could in legal and financial matters. Families would have taken pride in their financial and social support of La Concezione, the convent had a prominent place at court and its selective admittance assured that the families accepted were those closest to the Medici family. Additionally, a religious vocation was the highest calling for a woman, her obligation to pray and sacrifice was important to her kin network as well as to the city—as a central component of early modern Catholicism, this would have brought honor to her family.

Art and Architecture

In the absence of an abundance of personal documents, researchers have turned to the art and architecture of an institution to provide clues as to the priorities and character of the community that inhabited it.²⁹ Convents in particular lend themselves to this type

²⁹ Marilyn Dunn, “Piety and Patronage in Sixteenth Century Rome: Two Noblewomen and Their Convents,” *The Art Bulletin* 76/4 (December 1994): 644-63; Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women’s Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth Century Neapolitan Convents*

of analysis because the external appearance of structures was usually planned to fit within the city walls as an important part of communal life and the internal structures and adornments were designed to accommodate the social and liturgical functions and also to provide a display of wealth or political affinities.

The physical plant of La Concezione was atypical. It was a rather small space; designed to house only twenty veiled sisters and a handful of servant-sisters, the living quarters were not as expansive as the larger convents such as Le Murate and had few separate apartments.³⁰ The chapel was also a departure from typical female monastic institutions. Slightly different than the double church architecture in which two completely separate spaces were joined across the altar—one for public worship, one for the privacy and seclusion of the sisters—La Concezione maintained a cloistered chapel above the altar and only a very small church that was not open to the general public, although it is unclear how often visitors such as the Duke, cavalieri or inhabitants' families were in the chapel. The restrictions placed on such a notable institution would have created an aura of mystery and secrecy—it was located in such a way to be highly visible but access was so limited that most people could only speculate about its interior

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kate Lowe, "Nuns and Choice: Artistic Decision-Making in Medicean Florence," in *With and Without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage, 1434-1530*, eds. Eckart Marchand and Alison Wright (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 129-53; Ann M. Roberts, "Chiara Gambacorta of Pisa as Patroness of the Arts," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 120-54; Anabel Thomas, *Art and Piety in the Female Religious Communities of Renaissance Italy: Iconography, Space and the Religious Woman's Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Carolyn Valone, "Roman Matrons as Patrons: Various Views of the Cloister Wall," in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 49-72.

³⁰ The only separate quarters were those constructed for Princess Maria Cristina de' Medici, 1609-c.1632. Exactly what happened to her apartment after her departure is not documented in convent records and has not yet surfaced in the Medici family archives.

and its inhabitants. The Medici perhaps used this shroud of mystification to enhance the convent's image of a place of both superior devotion and wealth.

Although the convent was a late addition to the city center of Florence, it was not built atop another structure; rather it was constructed around the previously sanctified and historically significant *Sale del Papa* of the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria Novella. The original rooms were the quarters of visiting popes as well as other distinguished guests; the finest architects and designers had been hired to create the rooms and even Da Vinci had worked on the frescos, though they were left uncompleted.³¹ In re-appropriating the space to create part of La Concezione in the 1570s, the Medici made a public gesture that stated the importance of the new convent even before it was built— quarters befitting the pope were the most appropriate housing for daughters of the court.

In addition to the artworks native to the *Sale del Papa*, the early years of La Concezione boasted several waves of artistic commissions. The first such wave, between 14 November 1592 and the following 7 January, included payments to painters, sculptors, candle makers, and leather and ironsmiths for crosses of gold and silver, decorated tables, altars and pedestals, a bust of Eleonora, and the coat of arms of the duke and duchess

³¹ Rev. J. Wood Brown, *The Dominican Church of Santa Maria Novella at Florence: A Historical Architectural and Artistic Study* (Edinburgh: Otto Schulze & Co, 1902), 90-92.

In honor of a visit from Pope Martin V, the city voted for 1500 florins to build a new lodging worthy of the guest in 1419. Giuliano Pesello was the painter, Lorenzo di Bartoluccio Ghiberti was the designer, Donatello the sculptor, among other artists. The Sale del Papa were the upper storey on the west side of the Great Cloister, Via della Scala was to the south and provided a separate entrance to the rooms. Popes Martin V visited 1419-1420, Eugenius IV in 1434 for the Ecumenical Council in 1515, and Leo X (a Medici Pope) stayed there during their visit, as did other guests. Excellent decorations were added by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, on which Vasari commented. Lionardo da Vinci began work on the never completed "Battle of Anghiari cartoon."

painted on the communion window between the sisters and the altar.³² The private or public use of these objects depended on their location within the convent. Those in the exterior chapel, the altar, the coat of arms and perhaps many of the smaller objects would not have been seen by the sisters in the choir as the walls and grates obscured their view of the chapel; however, such devotional articles would have framed the sisters' station as chaste virgins, their social class as part of the patriciate, and their political connection to the Medici court.³³ During the vestiture and profession rituals, a sister would have been surrounded by these objects that would come to define her new 'public' and 'private' persona. Those objects unseen by the cavalieri and any invited guests— the bust of the patroness, the fine table inside the cloister chapel and other works of art— were for the private devotional practices of the sisters and were reflective of their relationship with the church as 'brides of Christ,' although political influences such as iconographies of saints like Mary, Stephen and Michael— those significant to the court and the Order— were certainly likely.

The choir loft connected to the chapel with the main altar was a space for both private devotion and spiritual conversation while it was also a gateway to the outside world. The description and the rules concerning the grates separating the internal choir loft from the external chapel are remarkably similar to those about the parlor.

1. Since the other grates that faced into the Church have been removed and walled in, leaving only the one that faces into the room over the courtyard, we want that this [i.e. the grate that faces from the Church into the

³² ASF CRS 134, Pezzo 32, Libro Giornale, 1592-1605, f.4-8.

³³ It is likely that during processions and other times when the public chapel was closed, that the sisters would have seen the items adorning the church then.

courtyard room] be always closed from within with its wooden shutter, and with the cloth drawn against the iron bars, and let it serve for the Sisters to hear from there [the courtyard room] the preaching, [or] in order to speak to the Monsignor or to other Priests or Persons that will have come to the Monastery, to the Examiners of the Novices, to the Padre Spirituale, and in order to celebrate [the mass], to deliver the contracts belonging to the Monastery. Let it also serve for the Doorkeepers to hear the Mass with the cloth drawn, which they will be allowed to lift a little from the bars when the Lord is raised [i.e. at the Eucharist], in which case in order not to be seen they shall keep the window of said room half-open; [but] never let any other Sister go to speak there without the express permission of the Abbess.

2. The grates of the Choir, when there are people in the Church, shall always be kept covered with double black cloth spread out over the iron bars, and [the cloth should] only be raised at the Mass when the Celebrant raises the Holy Sacrament, and when the Confessor is in the Church to give confession. Both those [i.e. the grates] of the Choir and those of the Door shall be kept closed with their wood shutters.³⁴

The grate, cloths and shutters, along with the physical walls, create a separation that changes the space for different occasions. The internal and external chapels could become completely separate spaces or they could be opened up, as the documents indicate was the case for processions around the convent that included the main altar.³⁵

The ‘doorkeepers’ again play an important role in the fortification of the cloister. In

³⁴ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Quartodecimo: Delle Grate di Chiesa e del Coro, p.59.
1. Essendosi rimurate, e levate le altre Grate che rispondevono in Chiesa, e lasciata quella sola che risponde nella stanza del Cortile, vogliamo che questa dalla parte di d[entr]o stia sempre chiusa con la sua imposta di legno, e con la tela tirata rasente i ferri, e serva alle Mon[ach]e per sentire di quivi la Predica, per parlare, a Monsignor o a altri Prelati e Personaggi che venissero al Mona[ster]o, alli Esaminatori delle Novizie, al Padre Spirituale, e per celebrare, erogare i Contratti apparententi al Mona[ster]o, serva ancora alle Portinare per udir Messa con la tela tirata, la quale al levar del Signore potranno alzare un tantino dalle bande, dove per non esser vedute tenghino la finestra della detta stanza socchiusa, ne mai vi vada a parlare alcuna altra Mon[ac]a senza espressa licenza della Sup[erior]a.

2. Le Grate del Coro, quando è gente in Chiesa sempre si tenghino coperte con tela nera doppia stesa sopra i ferri, e solamente si alzi alla Messa per tanto quanto si alza il Santissimo dal Sacerdote, e quando il Padre Confessore e in Chiesa a confessare tanto quelle del Coro quanto quella della Porta si tenghino chiuse con l'imposte di legno.

³⁵ See Chapter Four.

protecting the space between the Coro and the main chapel, they were responsible for opening and closing the shutters as well as drawing the cloth that kept them hidden; presumably, the doorkeeper had the power to allow a select group to see the altar during the Eucharist. It is probably for this reason that the women who held such positions were required to be senior members of the community who were of a serious disposition.

La Concezione's image as an austere environment of reform is reflected not only in what the convent did, but also in what it did not do. In a letter to Caterina Medici Gonzaga in Mantova, the author, Curzio Picchena, reports that Cosimo II had invited composer Gian Domenico Puliaschi to write music for the singer Francesca Caccini to sing; also, the actress Caterina da Picchena-Duondelmonti was asked to perform for the princesses—including Maria Cristina—at the Pitti Palace. The same comedic work had also been performed at Le Murate and La Crocetta; notably, La Concezione was not a site of performance for such a work as it would have tarnished the image forged by the reform efforts.³⁶

Inhabitants

While the public image of the convent was largely managed by the Order and the Medici court, the internal, day-to-day character of the cloister was established first through the Abbess, then through the other office holders and senior *velate*, then by professed sisters of the choir, the junior members, the novices, the converse and finally to

³⁶ ASF MP 6108, f.1036. Documentary Sources for the Arts and Humanities. The Medici Archive Project, Inc. MAP DOC ID #6800.

any *educande* in residence. This hierarchy seems clear and ordered but it should be remembered that social rank outside the convent most likely held persuasion inside the convent. The presence of each Medici princess, for example, would have been a fundamental factor in defining the atmosphere in the cloister regardless of their profession status.³⁷

The convent was a microcosm of the outside world—a community that lived and worked together, it had a power structure with governance, there was a system for inculcating and educating new members, there were social mores for rising, eating, praying, making music and settling disputes, and finally, there were both private and public aspects of individual and collective life. In effect, although inside the cloister was the ‘private’ space of the sisters in that no outsiders held daily influence, the social structure of the microcosm could claim this additional layer of the public and private spheres.

Music provides two examples of the ways in which the convent maintained its pristine image by working with the rules but still enhancing their musical environs. Chapter Four discussed the ruling that polyphony was not allowed to tarnish the public image, but was permitted within the confines of the convent where it could be privately enjoyed.³⁸ As seen in Chapter Three, teachers were paid to teach the daughters to play keyboard instruments; however, this was to be strictly guarded so as to maintain *clausura*.

³⁷ As was clearly the case at La Crocetta when Maria Magdalena took up residence in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Harness, *Echoes*, Chapters 7 and 8.

³⁸ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55.

...ricordando loro che per Decreto della Sac[r]a Cong[regazione] dell'Anno 1620 e proibito il cantare di canto figurato in pubblico, ma solamente e concesso tra di lor privatamente.

“If there is a need for some sister to learn plainchant or the figured style, or to play an instrument (even the Organ), this is not allowed to happen through the door of the cloister, but only at the grate.”³⁹ The lesson took place in semi-private—the parlor grate was in a public area in the sense that it was not in the cloister, however, as a sister making polyphony was considered incongruous with the image of the perfect cloister, it is a fair hypothesis that the parlor was otherwise closed, save a senior sister to keep watch on the propriety of the situation. The sisters may have been willing more to accept the restrictions on public music knowing that they could play and sing polyphony in private for their own benefit. Perhaps this was a compromise between the women and their superiors, or perhaps on the issue of ‘nun music,’ the dukes sided with authorities such as King Ferdinand I of Spain, Archbishop of Milan Federico Borromeo and Archbishop of Siena Ascanio II Piccolomini who felt that music could hold a very powerful, positive influence over religious women. Inappropriate music, that is, secular, profane or publicly flaunted polyphony were certainly contraventions that could garner punished, either upon individuals or for entire institutions. Interestingly, the Constitution does not discuss any punishments pertaining to music, but the more general category of jurisprudence was a significant concern.

The Constitution has several chapters on the forms that justice took within the convent; by observing the punishments and rewards (mostly the former are noted in the

³⁹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Terzo decimo: Del chiamare, andare e stare alle Grate, p.55.
...che bisognando a alcuna Mon[ac]a imparare Canto fermo o figurato, o suono etiam che di Organo non si possa fare in su la porta della clausura, ma solamente alla grata.

Constitution) it becomes clear that both private and public forms of repentance were central to maintaining the social structure of the small community. One way that the sisters created a sense of public order was to train the novitiate class in acts of obedience and humility.

9. In order to practice Humility and to show [appropriate] distaste for their status, [the *maestre* of the novices] shall make [the novices] do some form of mortification, not only in the Novices' Hall amongst themselves, but also in the Choir, and in the Refectory in a public act, such as to kiss the feet of the Sisters, to carry the crown of thorns, or similar acts.

14. In order to train them in loosening themselves from the things of the World and from relatives, let [the teachers] endeavor to illuminate them, and have them learn about the vanity and [?] of all worldly things, the brevity of the present life, the eternity of the future [life]; the dangers of Health that one meets within the world; and let them ensure that their conversations not be of mundane things, nor of relatives but of these things and above all let them seek to make them learn the end for which they were created by God, that is in order to love Him, and to serve Him in this life and then to enjoy Him eternally in the other life in the company of the blessed Angels and the Saints.⁴⁰

This passage speaks to the teachers of the novices—the *maestra* and her assistants; the novices in question would have been teenagers, some unaccustomed to the weight of the topic. In denouncing the secular world, just as in kissing the feet of a sister, the novices make a public gesture, beyond the formal rituals of investiture and profession. Beyond

⁴⁰ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Seconda, Capitolo Nono: Della Maestra, e Pedagoga delle Novizie e Noviziato, p.191.

9. Per esercizio d'Umiltà, e disprezzo della propria riputazione faranno far loro qualche mortificazione, non solamente in Nov.to fra di loro, ma anco in Coro, o in Refettorio pubblicamente, come baciare i piedi alle Mon[ach]e, portar la Corona di spine e simili.

14. Per esercitarle nello staccamento dalle cose del Mondo e da parenti si ingegnino darli lume, e farle apprendere la vanità e [-] di tutte le cose del mondo, la brevità della vita presente, l'eternità della futura; i pericolo della Salute che nel Mondo si trovano; e procurino che i lor ragionamenti non sieno di cose mondane, ne di parenti ma di queste cose e soprattutto cerchino di farli apprendere il fine per il quale elle son create da Dio, che e per amarlo, e servirlo in questa vita e poi goderlo eternamente nell'altra in compagnia de gli Angioli Beati, e de Santi.

the novitiate years, disobedience was not tolerated either towards the convent leadership nor towards the Florentine government.

Nor are we able to exclude from sin the disobedience made by the Sisters against the rules of the Abbess, and towards the Teachers by their students. For while the Abbess and the Teachers do not have spiritual jurisdiction in virtue of which they can judge their subjects to be in sin; on the other hand, the subjects are obligated to be obedient to them by the natural and divine laws, as daughters [obey] their mother, or citizens [obey] the Magistrates: and just as children sin in disobeying their mother, and as citizens do in not observing the rules of the Princes and the Magistrates, likewise these [the nuns] sin in disobeying their Superiors; whether these disobediences shall be [considered] grave sins, or light ones we leave it to the judgment of the Father Confessor.⁴¹

Only the confessor could determine whether something was a sin; curiously, the abbess, leader of her community, was deemed unfit to make this distinction, perhaps because she was a woman, a station not associated with laws and penalties. This did not mean that sisters' "transgressions" did not incur strict punishments within the convent, however.

.... [Saint Benedict] judged that it was necessary to establish [within the rule] the punishments for those who transgressed it because he knew that the fervor of charity easily cools itself, and when it has cooled, [?] the fear of punishment is necessary to the individual; this is all the more appropriate for those of us who take to the Religious life girls under a certain age, and consequently, of little understanding about the life of a religious woman, of the fragile sex, and mostly without spiritual sense and fervor; we thus order the punishments for transgressions of the Rule, and Constitution, so that fear may prevail, where love has no strength and power. ... For light transgressions under the laws by the old chapters it was assigned [for the guilty sister] to tell of her guilt before the chapter, or

⁴¹ BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 152, Parte Prima, Capitolo Ottavo: Del Voto di Obbedienza in particolare, p.28.

4. Ne etiam possiamo scusare da peccato le disubbidienze che si fanno dalle Mon[ach]e contro i precetti della Bad[ess]a, e delle Maestre dalle loro suddite, per che se bene la M[adre] Bad[ess]a, e le Mae[str]e non hanno iurisdizione spirituale in virtu della quale possino obbligare a peccato le suddite: tutta via le suddite sono obligate ad obbedirele per legge naturale, e divina, come figliuolole la Madre, o come i Cittadini i Magistrati: e si come i figliuololi peccano in disubbidire la Madre, e i cittadini nel non osservare i precetti de Principi e de Magistrati, cosi queste peccano nel disobbedire le loro Superiore, quando poi queste disobbedienze si[a]no peccato grave, o leggiero lo lasciamo al giudizio del Padre Confessoro.

in the refectory, eating on the floor, deprivation from [admittance to] the grate, the whipping on the back with the *vetrice*, (long, straight branches made into a whip) and similar things ... [she will ask] for forgiveness from the person she offended or scandalized- in public, if the offense was public, or in private if the offense was in private.⁴²

A convent was made up of many public and private actions, rules and pretenses.

At La Concezione, the public image was paramount— extensive efforts were made by the Medici court, the Order of Santo Stefano, and the prominent families that made up the community to ensure that La Concezione was seen as exclusive, refined and devout above all. For their part, the actions taken by sisters representing the public character of the institution in the secular world included their vow-taking ceremony, cutting their hair, wearing the habit and using the parlor and choir grates to separate themselves from the world. In the private community of the cloister, there were equally significant public and private acts, although these were not the grand gestures of formal ritual; they were the everyday acts of maintaining order, establishing a personal reputation, and those of jubilation and contrition, not unlike the ways image was formed in the secular community.

⁴² BNCF Mazz. Inv. II II 15, Capitolo quarantesimo quarto: Delle punizioni de difetti grani, e leggieri , p.137.

... giudico necesario costituire in essa le pene a trasgressori di quella: perche sapeua che il feruore della carità facilmente si raffredda, e raffreddata al carità e necessario il freno del timore della pena; molto più si conviene, che noi che riceviamo alla Relgione figliuolole di poca età, e consequentemente di poca intelligenza di vita Religiosa, di sesso friagile, e per lo più senza spirito, e feruore, ordiniamo le pene delle trasgressioni della Regola, e Constituzioni, acciò preuaglia il temore, dove nona forza, e virtu l'amore.

... Per le colpe leggieri fu assegnato da capitoli vechi il dire la sua colpa in capitolo, o vero in Refettorio, il mangiare in terra, la privazione delle grate, il battere una spalla con le vetrice, e simili ... il chieder perdono a chi la persona offende, o scandolezza, in pubblico, se l'offersa e pubblica, o in privato se l'offesa e in privato.

Conclusions

The women of La Concezione performed music as part of their public image as the elite convent for the daughters of the court and as a model of the ideals of Catholic reform and renewal. The pure simplicity of plainchant—the only music officially sanctioned by the Church for female religious— was performed during Mass, the Daily Offices and in rituals held in the semi-public church. In this manner, an effective contrast could be made between the cloistered ‘brides of Christ,’ their heavenly voices emanating from the choir unseen, and the earthly polyphony in the church made by hired musicians from the Order of Santo Stefano and the court of the Medici.

Several factors affected the ways music was taught, rehearsed and performed in the convent. Of the utmost importance was the impact of the spirit of reform – including the Medici’s reading of the decrees of the Council of Trent, the political ties that connected the convent to the Order of Santo Stefano and to the Medici Court, and the musical culture that surrounded the convent. In effect, the community of La Concezione maintained a public display of monophony that proclaimed its adherence to reform, held the sisters in a place of honor in Florence, and may have helped to bond the sisterhood through solidarity and tradition.

While reforms within the Catholic Church began before, and continued after, the early modern era, one defining moment for the Church was the gathering of the Council of Trent. The decrees codified during the mid-sixteenth-century meetings were widely

distributed and were understood to be part of the new direction of piety amongst the faithful. The interpretation of the decrees by local authorities, both secular and ecclesiastical, was as important as the Council's intention in terms of the larger momentum for reform. In Florence, the Medici implemented the official mandates in the manner that was most advantageous to the objectives of the Dukes—the founding and operation of both the Order of Santo Stefano and the convent of La Concezione were based on the Medici reading of Tridentine reforms.

Trent's published mandates on musical practices were actually rather minimal; the larger impact came from the agenda of a few ecclesiastic and secular leaders. In essence, the secular influences and complexities of the early and mid- sixteenth century were thought to be excessive and not conducive to devotion. Female religious in particular were not to be permitted the contemporary (polyphonic) styles of music because they detracted from the spiritual mission of the sisters, and such musical activity encouraged interaction with outside forces such as male composers, performers and teachers in particular. While many convents across Italy sought to learn, perform and even compose polyphony for their public church, this was evidently not the case at La Concezione.

The Medici family desired a convent that would uphold the reforms of the church; in order to accomplish this, they created 'il monastero nuovo,' one that had no tradition of breaking clausura or secular musical influences. In her last testament of 1562, Eleonora di Toledo established the financial, cultural and philosophical underpinnings for an institution worthy of the daughters of the court – including a Medici princess; Cosimo I set the plans in motion to found the convent and arranged for his personal knighthood,

the Cavalieri di Santo Stefano to serve as their superiors; their son Ferdinando I and his consort Christina of Lorraine opened the convent in 1592 with a great flurry of political pageantry, artistic commissions and displays of feminine devotion. The Medici family would continue to be active in the affairs of the convent, but it was the Order of Santo Stefano whose daily effect on the sisters is most evident in convent documents. Cavalieri members of the Benedictine Rule served as the priests for the Mass and for the rituals of investiture and profession, as confessors— both regular and extraordinary, and as the Florentine bureaucrats in charge of monastic governance.

Both the Medici court and the Order had rich traditions of music: their members were patrons of the finest performers and composers, grand public events such as courtly weddings prominently included the newest musical styles, and the account records of both the court and the Order indicate the extensive resources that were dedicated to personnel, instruments, and commissions. The culture of musical engagement seeped into the fiber of the convent. The sisters, although they did not publicly perform polyphony, were exposed to contemporary musical styles through the musicians who were hired to enhance the services with sung masses, concertos and sinfonias; the teachers who were paid to teach singing, organ and perhaps other instruments; as well as any books and supplies that may have found their way to the convent. Privately, the sisters of La Concezione had greater freedom to enjoy polyphony within the confines of the cloister. Music was heard throughout the day, not only in the services, but also in daily activities such as washing, working, processions and praying—some of it may well have been polyphonic. No trace of polyphony has been found in the convent's records, however,

and it is unlikely that any will surface because its practice was intentionally kept hidden from the public.

The effort that the court, the Order, the sisters and their families put into maintaining an environment of strict clausura, patrician education, and apposite devotion created an image of moral superiority that the Medici family could present as an example to their contemporaries of Florence as a godly city of piety, feminine virtue, artistic merit and political import. This was an image that the inhabitants had to accept and propagate in order for the reflection to be maintained. Such an image was in the interest of the sisters in their cloistered community because they were bound by familial kinships of aunts, cousins and siblings, social networks that extended beyond the walls and meaningful traditions that elevated their earthly sacrifice to one of heavenly salvation.

This dissertation follows in the footsteps of the last twenty-five years of scholars studying the music of monastic women and it asks new questions that will challenge our perception of the music of wealthy, enclosed women—the public image they wished to promote and the private reality they maintained, the veracity of political alliances, and the role of monophony in post-Tridentine devotion. The convents of early modern Florence—rich in political, social, religious, artistic, theatrical and musical aspirations—will provide many avenues for future investigation that will ultimately further our collective understanding of the musical past.

One might expect that because La Concezione was an elite institution with educated, well-connected patrician daughters, that all manner of musics, including

secular influences and fashionable trends would have been abundant in their public church where they could announce the depths of their devotion through polyphony, in the parlor where concerts could show off the virtuosity of the performers, and through commissions and dedications that underscored their rightful place as a leading center of cultural enterprise. It had long been the assumption of the scholarly community that convents were isolated places of strict adherence to rules such as clausura and monophony; however, the last decade of the twentieth century brought forth a preponderance of evidence that many convents, particularly wealthy ones, bent or broke many rules to suit their expectations of patrician standards of living— including engaging in musical performances that mirrored their uncloistered contemporaries. The sheer number of requests made by convent communities for exceptions, admonishments by authorities for the loosening of strictures as well as punishments for blatant abuses has led the scholarly community to understand that not all communities adhered to musical reforms, and as *La Concezione* proves, neither did all communities eschew reformers' mandates. At this time, no systematic study of early modern Italian convents and their musical practices has been conducted— for now, observers of history must be content to understand that musical culture was not static, nor was it standardized across institutions. Each enclosed woman practiced and enjoyed music as an individual and as part of her community.

Suzanne Cusick avers that a “gynecentric world” looks and sounds different—certainly, the community of *La Concezione* confirms this perspective. Music

performed by and for women in a relatively isolated space created a sense of community through the creation of a shared identity. Each woman brought with her the wealth, education and political connections of her childhood; collectively they were branded as highly visible representatives of the court and its knighthood. As a group, they represented the moral superiority of Florence and the highest calling of womanhood as ‘brides of Christ.’ Within the cloister, the women performed ritual acts—both large and small—through the purity of plainchant when there was a public, and through devotional laude and hymns when there were only women.

Cristoforo Bronzini’s *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne*, the dialogue amongst characters about the virtues of women, took place in an environment that, like the court of Archduchesses and Regents Christina of Lorraine and Maria Maddalena of Habsburg Austria, was *gynecentric*. In this world, music is engaged by the upper as well as servant classes, those of great musical talent as well as those of meager abilities— “a vision of women’s music-making that includes but does not privilege professionalism or virtuosity.”¹ Instead, music leads the feminine body, mind and soul to virtue and devotion. Across town, the women of La Concezione embody this fictionalized reality. They are a community of women, educated, connected and creative; the enclosure isolates them, but the music they put forth connects them to each other and to the outside world. While in private exceptional talent could be displayed, it would not be shared beyond the walls— for the public venue, the community of La Concezione chose

¹ Suzanne G. Cusick, “Epilogue: Francesca Among Women, a ‘600 Gynecentric View,” in *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin LaMay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 442.

plainchant because it displayed not “professionalism or virtuosity” but power through purity.

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources:

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze, Collection Maglibecchiano 10.5.17/b. “Raccolta di alcune cose appartenenti alle Monache. Stabilite nel sinodo diocesano fatto in Firenze 14-15 Maggio 1619. Per ordine del Ill[usstri]ss e reverendiss[imo] Alessandro Marzi Medici Arcivescovo di Firenze.”

Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze, Mazzatinti Inventari II II 152. “Costituzioni e Ordini del ven[erabile]. Monastero della Concettione della S[anta] Vergine Maria, chiamato il Monastero Nuovo, in via della Scala di Firenze: con approvazione del 3 ottobre 1655 e con modificazioni del 1750.”

Archivio di Stato, Firenze, Compagnie Religiose Soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo, 134.
Various items.

Archivio di Stato, Firenze, Mediceo del Principato. Various items.

Archivio di Stato, Pisa, 566/567/568, Provanze di Nobilit.’

Archivio di Stato, Pisa, 2327, No. 910. Filza Straordinaria.

Archivio di Stato, Pisa, 2333, Filze Straordinaria, affari No. 1132- Musia della Chiesa, 1646.

Archivio di Stato, Pisa, 2878. “Il Cerimoniere Pratico ovvero un esatto Trattato delle funzioni Pontificali dafarsi dal Prelato dell’ Ordine Militare di S[anto] Stefano Papa e Mar[tir]e: nella Chiesa delle Monache della Santo Stefano Concezione di Firenze. Tomo Secondo.”

Primary Sources:

Coryate, Thomas, and George Coryate. *Coryat's Crudities; Hastily Gobled Up in Five Moneths Travells in France, Savoy, Italy, Rhetia Commonly Called the Grisons Country, Helvetia Alias Switzerland, Some Parts of High Germany and the Netherlands; Newly Digested in the Hungry Aire of Odcombe in the County of Somerset, and Now Dispersed to the Nourishment of the Travelling Members of This Kingdome*. Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1905.

Catholic Church, Emil Friedberg, and Aemilius Ludwig Richter. *Corpus iuris canonici*. Lipsiae: ex officina Bernhardi Tauchnitz, 1879. Reprinted Graz, 1959.

Council of Trent, *Canones et decreta Sacrosancti Oecumenici et Generalis Concilii Tridentini sub Pavlo III, Ivlio III, Pio IIII*. Pontificibus Max. CVM Privilegio. Mediolani Apud Antonium Antonianum. Session Tertia, 1564. The Getty Research Institute, Special Collections 93-B14438.

Giamboni, Lodovico Antonio. *Diario Sacro e Gida perpetua Per visitare le chiese della Citta' di Firenze, e suoi sobborghi in tutt' I giorni dell'Anno, e per sapere le feste, che vi si celebrano, l'Indulgenze perpetue che vi s'acquistano, e gl'Esercizi di devozione, e pietà che vi si fanno; Con una Notizia de'Corpi, e Reliquie di Santi, che in esse Chiese si confervano ed un Catalogo de SS.e BB.che in essa Cita' fioreirono, ed altre Particolarita'*. Opera di Lodovico Antonio Giamboni dedicata all' eccellentiss. Sig Dottore Givlio Benedetto Lorenzini. In Firenze, Nella Stamp. D'Iacopo Giuducci 1700. con Lic[enza] de'Sup[uperiori].” Getty Research Institute 86-B20370.

Jesuit Order, The. *Polanci Complementa. Epistolae et commentaria Pl Joannis Alphonsi de Polanco e Societate Jesu; addenda caeteris ejusdem scriptis disper*, 2 vols. Monumenta historica Societatis Iesu, 52, 54. Madrid: Gabrielis Lopiz del Horno, 1916-17; 1969.

Ordine de' Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, *Statvti, Capitoli, Et Constitvtioni, dell'Ordine de' Cavalieri di Santo Stefano, Fondato et dotato dall'Illust[issimo] Et Eccell[enza] S[ignor] Cosimo Medici, Duca II di Diorenza, e di Siena, Riformati dal Sereniss[imo] Don Ferdinando Medici, Terzo Gran Duca di Toscana et Gran Maestro di detto Ordine. Et approvati, et publicati nel Capitolo generale di detto Ordine, l'Anno MDXC. Con le facultà, indulti, et privilegi concessi dalla Santià di Papa Pio IIII et da N[ostro] S[ignor] Sisto Papa V et dal suddetto fondatore. Con la Tavola copiosissima delle materie, e Capitoli. In Fiorenza, Nella Stamperia di Filippo Giunti. MCXCVCon Licenza, et Privilegio Tassato in Quattro Giulii sciolto*. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas, CR 5535 S6 A3 1595 [The Medici Collection].

Scaduto, Francesco. *Stato e Chiesa sotto Leopoldo I, Granduca di Toscana (1765-90)*. Florence: C. Ademollo, 1885.

Tuscany (Grand Duchy), and Lorenzo Cantini. *Legislazione toscana*. Florence: Albizziniana, 1800, 1804.

Secondary Sources:

- Annibaldi, Claudio. "Towards a Theory of Musical Patronage in the Renaissance and Baroque: The Perspective from Anthropology and Semiotics." *Recercare* 10 (1998): 173-82.
- Baade, Colleen. "'Hired' Nun Musician in Early Modern Castile." In *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin LaMay, 287-310. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.
- Bacherini, Bartoli, and Maria Adelaide. *"Per un regale evento": spettacoli nuziali e opera in musica alla corte dei Medici*. Firenze: Centro Di, 2000.
- Baernstein, P. Renee. *A Convent Tale: A Century of Sisterhood in Spanish Milan*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- _____. "In the Widow's Habit: Women between Convent and Family in Sixteenth-Century Milan." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25/4 (Winter 1994): 787-807.
- Battara, Pietro. *La popolazione di Firenze alla metà del '500*. Florence: Rinascimento dell Libro, 1935.
- Bailey, Terence. *Antiphon and psalm in the Ambrosian office*. Ottawa, Canada: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1994.
- Baldauf-Berdes, Jane L. *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations 1525-1855*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Barone, Giulia, Lucetta Scaraffia, and Gabriella Zarri. *Donne e fede: santità e vita religiosa in Italia*. Roma: Laterza, 1994.
- Berner, Samuel. "Florentine Society in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries." *Studies in the Renaissance* 18 (1971): 203-246.
- Bianconi, Lorenzo. *Music in the Seventeenth Century*. Translated by David Bryant. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Borgerding, Todd M., ed. *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*. New York, London: Routledge, 2002.
- Bornstein, Daniel. "Spiritual Kinship and Domestic Devotions." In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith C. Brown, and Robert C. Davis, 173-92. London: Longman, 1998.

- Barandoni, Stefano, and Paola Raffaelli. *L'archivio musicale della chiesa conventuale dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano di Pisa: storia e catalogo*. Series: Studi musicali toscani, iii. Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1994.
- Brown, Judith C. *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Brown, Judith C., and Robert C. Davis, eds. *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*. New York: Longman, 1998.
- Brown, Reverend J. Wood. *The Dominican Church of Santa Maria Novella at Florence: A Historical Architectural and Artistic Study*. Edinburgh: Otto Schulze & Co, 1902.
- Brucker, Gene A. "Monasteries, Friaries, and Nunneries in Quattrocento Florence." In *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imaginations in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon, and John Henderson, 41-62. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990.
- Burstyn, Shai. "Early 15th-Century Polyphonic Settings of *Song of Songs* Antiphons." *Acta Musicologica* 49/2 (July-December 1977): 200-227.
- Butters, H. C. *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence, 1502-1519*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- Carey, Frank. "Composition for Equal Voices in the Sixteenth Century" *The Journal of Musicology* 9/3 (Summer 1991): 300-342.
- Carter, Tim. "Rediscovering *Il rapimento di Cefalo*" *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 9/1 (2003).
- _____. *Music, Patronage and Printing in Late Renaissance Florence*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000.
- _____. "A Florentine Wedding of 1608." *Acta Musicologica* 55/1 (1983): 89-107.
- _____. *Music in Late Renaissance and Early Baroque Italy*. Portland, OR: Amadeus, 1992.

- _____. "Non occorre nominare tanti musici: Private Patronage and Public Ceremony in Late Sixteenth-Century Florence." *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4 (1991): 89-104.
- _____. "Music-Printing in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, Cristofano Marescotti and Zanobi Pignoni." *Early Music History: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music* 9 (1990): 27-72.
- _____. "Jacopo Peri, 1561-1633: His life and works." Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1979.
- Chater, James. "Love, Music and Spectacle in Counter-Reformation Rome: *Il carro dell'universo* (1587)." In *La musique et le rite sacre et profane*, 303-21. Strasbourg: University of Strasbourg, 1986.
- Chojnacki, Stanley. *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- _____. "Daughters and Oligarchs: Gender and the Early Renaissance State." In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, 63-86. London: Longman, 1998.
- Cohn, Samuel K. Jr. *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Cox-Rearick, Janet. "La Ill.ma Sig.ra Duchessa felice memoria: The Posthumous Eleonora di Toledo." In *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchessa of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler, 225-265. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.
- _____. "Bronzino's Crossing of the Red Sea and Moses Appointing Joshua: Prolegomena to the Chapel of Eleonora di Toledo." *The Art Bulletin* 69/1 (March 1987): 45-67.
- Culpepper, Danielle. "'Our Particular Cloister': Ursulines and Female Education in Seventeenth-Century Parma and Piacenza." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 36/4 (Winter 2005): 1017-1037.
- Curti, Danilo, and Marco Gozzi. *Musica e liturgia nella riforma tridentina*. Trento, Italy: Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Servizio Beni Librari e Archivistici, 1995.
- Cummings, Anthony M. *The Politicized Muse: Music for Medici Festivals, 1512-1537*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

- _____. "A Florentine Sacred Repertory from the Medici Restoration: (Manuscript II. I. 232 of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)." Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 1980.
- Cummings, Anthony, and Jessie Ann Owens, eds. *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Studies in Honor of Lewis Lockwood*. Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997.
- Cusick, Suzanne G. "Epilogue: Francesca Among Women, a '600 Gynecentric View.'" In *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin LaMay, 425-43. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.
- _____. "Of Women, Music, and Power: A Model from Seicento Florence." In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie, 281-304. Berkeley: University of California, 1993.
- D'Accone, Frank. "The Musical Chapels at the Florentine Cathedral and Baptistery During the First Half of the 16th Century." In *Music and Musicians in 16th-Century Florence*, 1-50. Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007.
- _____. *The Civic Muse: Music and Musicians in Siena during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- _____. "Lorenzo il Magnifico e la musica." In *La musica a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico: Congresso internazionale di studi*, ed. Gargiulo P., 219-248. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1993.
- _____. "Repertory and performance practice in Santa Maria Novella at the turn of the 17th century." In *A Festschrift for Albert Seay: Essays by his friends and colleagues*, ed. Michael D. Grace, 71-136. Colorado Springs: Colorado College, 1982.
- _____. "The Florentine Fra Mauros: A Dynasty of Musical Friars." *Musica Disciplina* 33 (1974): 77-137.
- Davis, Margaret Daly. *Giorgio Vasari: principi, letterati e artisti nelle carte di Giorgio Vasari, Casa Vasari, pittura vasariana dal 1532 al 1554, Sottochiesa di S. Francesco : [catalogo delle mostre] Arezzo, 26 settembre-29 novembre 1981*, Firenze: Edam, 1981.

- Davis, Raymond. *The book of pontiffs (Liber pontificalis): the ancient biographies of the first ninety Roman bishops to AD 715*. Translated texts for historians, v. 6. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000.
- Dean, Trevor, and Kate Lowe. *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1600*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Della Seta, Fabrizio, and Franco Piperno, eds. *In cantu et in sermone: For Nino Pirrotta on his 80th Birthday*. Florence: Leo Olschki, 1989.
- Diefendorf, Barbara B. "Contradictions of the Century of Saints: Aristocratic Patronage and the Convents of Counter-Reformation Paris." *French Historical Studies* 24/3 (2001): 469-99.
- Dunant, Sarah. *The Birth of Venus: Love and Death in Florence*. London: Little, Brown, 2003; reprinted New York: Random House, 2004.
- Dunn, Marilyn. "Piety and Patronage in Sixteenth Century Rome: Two Noblewomen and Their Convents." *The Art Bulletin* 76/4 (December 1994): 644-663.
- _____. "Nuns as Art Patrons: The Decoration of S. Marta al Collegio Romano." *Art Bulletin* 70/3 (1988): 451-77.
- Dyer, Joseph. "Monastic Psalmody of the Middle Ages." *Revue bénédictine* 99 (1989): 41-74.
- Edelstein, Bruce Leon. "The Early Patronage of Eleonora di Toledo: The Camera Verde and its Dependencies in the Palazzo Vecchio." Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1995.
- Evangelisti, Silvia. *Nuns: A History of Convent Life, 1450-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- _____. "Rooms to Share: Convent Cells and Social Relations in Early Modern Italy." *Past & Present* (August 2006 Supplement): 55-71.
- _____. "Monastic Poverty and Material Culture in Early Modern Italian Convents." *Historical Journal* 47/1 (2004): 1-20.
- _____. " "We Do Not Have it, and We Do Not Want It": Women, Power and Convent Reform in Florence." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 34/3 (2003): 677-700.

_____. "Wives, Widows, and Brides of Christ: Marriage and the Convent in the Historiography of Early Modern Italy." *Historical Journal* 43/1 (2000): 233-247.

Fantozzi Micali, Osanna, and Piero Roselli. *Le soppressioni dei conventi a Firenze*. 1980.

Fellerer, Karl Gustav. "Church Music and the Council of Trent." *Musical Quarterly* 39 (1953): 578-80.

Fenlon, Iain. *Music and Culture in Late Renaissance Italy*. New York: Oxford University 2002.

_____. *Music, Print and Culture in Early Sixteenth-Century Italy*. From "The Panizzi Lectures, 1994." London: British Library, 1995.

_____. "Preparations for a Princess: Florence 1588-89." In *In cantu et in sermone: For Nino Pirrotta on his 80th Birthday*, eds. Fabrizio Della Seta, and Franco Piperno, 259-81. Florence: Leo Olschki, 1989.

Fenlon, Iain, and James Haar. *The Italian Madrigal in the Early Sixteenth Century: Sources and Interpretation*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Follini, Vincenzo, and Modesto Rastrelli. *Firenze antica e moderna*. Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1970.

Franceschini, Chiara "Los scholars son cosa de su excelentia, como lo es toda la Compañia: Eleonora di Toledo and the Jesuits." In *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchess of Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler, 181-206. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

Freidson, Marion Facing. "The Meaning of Gertrude in *I Promessi Sposi*." *Italica* 28/1 (March 1951): 27-32.

Gabero Zorzi, Elvira, and Mario Sperenzi. *Teatro e spettacolo nella Firenze dei Medici: Modelli dei luoghi teatrali*. Florence: Leo Olschki, 2001.

Garfagnini, Gian Carlo, ed. *Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell'Europa del '500*. 3 vols. Biblioteca di storia Toscana moderna e contemporanea 26. Florence: Leo Olschki, 1983.

Gaston, Robert W. "Eleonora di Toledo's Chapel: Lineage, Salvation and the War Against the Turks." In *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo Duchess of*

- Florence and Siena*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler, 157-80. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.
- Gemignani, Marco. "The Navies of the Medici: the Florentine Navy and the Navy of the Sacred Military Order of Saint Stephen, 1547-1648." In *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Warfare in history, eds. John B. Hattendorf, and Richard W. Unger, 169-185. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Rochester, NY, 2003.
- Gill, Katherine. "Scandala: Controversies Concerning Clausura and Women's Religious Communities in Late Medieval Italy." In *Christendom and Its Discontents*, eds. Scott Waugh, and Peter Diehl, 177-203. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- _____. "Open Monestaries for Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy: Two Roman Examples." In *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson, 15-48. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Goldstein, Leonard. *The Origin of Medieval Drama*. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004.
- Gordis, Robert. "A Wedding Song for Solomon." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63/3 (September 1944): 263-270.
- Grassellini, Emilio, and Arnaldo Fracassini, *Profili medicei: origine, sviluppo, decadenza, della famiglia Medici attraverso i suoi componenti*. Florence: SP44, 1982.
- Hamburger, Jeffrey T. *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Hammond, Frederick. *Music and Spectacle in Baroque Rome: Barberini Patronage Under Urban VIII*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Harline, Craig. "Actives and Contemplatives: The Female Religious of the Low Countries Before and After Trent." *Catholic Historical Review* 81/4 (October 1995): 541-568.
- Harness, Kelley. *Echoes of Women's Voices: Music, Art, and female Patronage in Early Modern Florence*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

- _____. "Chaste Warriors and Virgin Martyrs in Florentine Musical Spectacle." In *Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music*, ed. Todd M. Borgerding, 73-121. New York, London: Routledge, 2002.
- _____. "La Flora and the End of Female Rule in Tuscany." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 437-476.
- _____. "Amazzoni di Dio: Florentine Musical Spectacle Under Maria Maddalena d'Austria and Cristina di Lorena, 1620-1630." Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1996.
- Hathaway, Janet. "Cloister, Court and City: Musical activity of the Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales (Madrid), ca. 1620--1700." Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2005.
- Hayburn, Robert F. *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music: 95 AD to 1977 AD*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1977.
- Heller, Wendy. *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice*. Berkeley: University of California, 2004.
- Hibbard, Howard. "Guido Reni's Painting of the Immaculate Conception." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 28/1 (Summer 1969): 18-32.
- Hibbert, Christopher. *Florence: The Biography of a City*. London: Folio Society, 1997.
- _____. *The House of Medici: its Rise and Fall*. New York: Morrow Press, 1975.
- Hill, John Walter. "The Musical Chapel of the Florence Cathedral in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century: Vitali, Comparini, Sapiti, Cerri." In *Atti del VII centenario del Duomo di Firenze. III: Cantate Domino--Musica nei secoli per il Duomo di Firenze*, eds. Verdon, Timothy, and Annalisa Innocenti, 175-194. Florence: Edifir, 2001.
- _____. "Florence: Musical Spectacle and Frama, 1570-1650." In *The Early Baroque Era from the Late Sixteenth Century to the 1660s*, ed. Curtis Price, 121-45. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993.
- _____. "Realized Continuo Accompaniments from Florence c. 1600." *Early Music* 11/2 (April 1983): 194-208.
- Hills, Helen. *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth Century Neapolitan Convents*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- _____. *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.
- Howard, Peter, and Cynthia Troup. *Cultures of Devotion: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Religion*. Victoria, Australia: Monash University Press, 2005.
- Hsia, R. Po-Chia. *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Howe, Nicholas. *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Modern Europe*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007.
- Istaels, Machtelt. "Altars on the Street: The Wool Guild, the Carmelites and the Feast of Corpus Domini in Siena (1356-1456)." *Renaissance Studies* 20/2 (April 2006): 180-200.
- Jedin, Hubert. *A History of the Council of Trent*. Translated by Ernest Graf. London, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1957-1961.
- Kelly-Gadol, Joan. "Did Women have a Renaissance?" In *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 175-201. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977, reprint 1987.
- Kendrick, Robert L. *The Sounds of Milan, 1585-1650*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- _____. "Response to Kimberly Montford." *The Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 6/1 (2000).
- _____. *Celestial Sirens: Nuns and their Music in Early Modern Milan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- _____. "Four Views of Milanese Nuns' Music." In *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, 324-42. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- _____. "The Traditions of Milanese Convent Music and the Sacred Dialogues of Chiara Margarita Cozzolani." In *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson, 211-33. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.

- King, Catherine. "Women as Patrons: Nuns, Widows and Rulers." In *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion, 1280-1400*, 2 vols, ed. Diana Norman, 2:243-66. New Haven, CT , London: Yale University Press, 1995.
- King, Margaret L. *Women of the Renaissance*. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Kirkendale, Warren. "The Myth of the "Birth of Opera." In "The Florentine Camerata Debunked by Emilio de' Cavalieri--A Commemorative Lecture." *Opera Quarterly* 19/4 (Fall 2003): 631-643.
- _____. *Emilio de' Cavalieri "gentiluomo romano": His Life and Letters, his Role as Superintendent of All the Arts at the Medici Court, and his Musical Compositions--With Addenda to L'Aria di Fiorenza and The Court Musicians in Florence*. *Historiae musicae cultores*, No: 86. Florence: Leo Olschki, 2001.
- _____. *The Court Musicians in Florence During the Principate of the Medici: With a Reconstruction of the Artistic Establishment*. Series: *Historiae musicae cultores biblioteca* no: 61. Firenze, Italy, 1993.
- Klapisch-Zuber, Christiane. *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Kurtzman, Jeffrey G. "Tones, modes, clefs and pitch in Roman cyclic Magnificats of the 16th Century." *Early Music* 22/4 (November 1994): 641-662.
- LaMay, Thomasin, ed. *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.
- Lapini, Agostino. *Diario Fiorentino di Agostino Lapini dal 252 al 1596*. Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1900.
- Laven, Mary. "Cast Out and Shut In: The Experience of Nuns in Counter-Reformation Venice." In *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Pre-Modern Italy*, ed. Stephen J. Milner, 93-101. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- _____. *Virgins of Venice: Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent*. London: Viking Press, 2002.
- Lawrence, Clifford H. *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3d ed. Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2001.

- Lawrence-White, Stephanie. "Musical education at the Ospedale degli Innocenti, Florence." Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, District of Columbia, 2005.
- Lehfeldt, Elizabeth A. "Discipline, Vocation, and Patronage: Spanish Religious Women in a Tridentine Microclimate." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30/4 (Winter 1999): 1009-1030.
- Litchfield, R. Burr. "Demographic Characteristics of Florentine Patrician Families, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries." *Journal of Economic History* 29 (June 1969): 191-205.
- Litta, Pompeo, Luigi Passerini, Federico Odorici, Federico Stefani, Francesco di mauro Polvica, and Constantino Coda. *Famiglie celebri italiane*. Milano: P.E. Giusti, 1819.
- Lockwood, Lewis H. *The Counter-Reformation the Masses of Vincenzo Ruffo*. Studi di musica veneta 2, Venice: Fondazione di Giorgio Cini, 1970.
- _____. "Vincenzo Ruffo and Musical Reform after the Council of Trent." *Musical Quarterly* 43/1 (1957): 342-371.
- Lonardo, Pietro M. "Lettere inedite di Giorgio Vasari." *Studi Storici* 6 (1897): 257-67.
- Lowe, Kate J. P. *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- _____. "Elections of Abbesses and Notions of Identity in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy with Special Reference to Venice." *Renaissance Quarterly* 54/2 (Summer 2001): 389-429.
- _____. "Nuns and Choice: Artistic Decision-Making in Medicean Florence." In *With and Without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage, 1434-1530*, eds. Eckart Marchand and Alison Wright, 129-53. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.
- _____. "Secular Brides and Convent Brides: Wedding Ceremonies in Italy during the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation." In *Marriage in Italy 1300-1600*, ed. Trevor Dean, and Kate Lowe, 41-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- _____. "Women's Work at the Benedictine Convent of Le Murate in Florence: Suora Battista Carucci's Roman Missal of 1509." In *Women and the Book: Assessing*

- the Visual Evidence*, eds. Jane Taylor and Leslie Smith, 133-48. London: British Library, Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Macey, Patrick. "Infiamma il mio cor: Savonarolan *Laude* by and for Dominican Nuns in Tuscany. In *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson, 161-89. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Makowski, Elizabeth. "Mulieres Religiosae, Strictly Speaking: Some Fourteenth-Century Canonical Opinions." *Catholic Historical Review* 85/1 (January 1999): 1-15.
- _____. *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its Commentators, 1298-1545*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997.
- Manzoni, Alessandro. *I Promessi Sposi*. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909-14, 2001.
- Marchand, Eart, and Alison Wright, eds. *With and Without the Medici, Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage, 1434-1530*. London: Ashgate, 1998.
- Marinella, Lucrezia. *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Vices and Defects of Men*. Translated by Anne Dunhill. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Marshall, Sherrin, ed. *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Public and Private*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Masetti Zannini, Gian Ludovico. *Motivi storici della educazione femminile (1500-1650)*. Bari, Italy: EditorialeBari, 1980.
- Matter, E. Ann. "The Personal and the Paradigm: The Book of Maria Domitilla Galluzzi." In *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson, 87-103. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Matter, E. Ann, and John Coakley, eds. *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- Maus, Fred E. "Masculine Discourse in Music Theory." *Perspectives of New Music* 30/2 (Summer 1993): 264-303.
- MacNeil, Anne. *Music and Women of the Commedi dell'arte in the Late Sixteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University, 2003.

- McGee, Timothy J. "In the Service of the Commune: The Changing Role of Florentine Civic Musicians, 1450-1532." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30/3 (Fall 1999): 727-42.
- McIver, Katherine A., ed. *Art and Music in the Early Modern Period: Essays in Honor of Franca Trinchieri Camiz*. London: Ashgate, 2003.
- McLamore, Alyson, Irene Alm, Colleen Reardon, eds. *Musica Franca: Essays in honor of Frank A. D'Accone*. Stuyvesant: Pendragon, 1996.
- Medioli, Francesca. "An Unequal Law: The Enforcement of *Clausura* Before and After Trent." In *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Christine Meek, 136-52. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000.
- Medioli, Francesca, ed. *L'inferno monacale di Suor Arcangela Tarabotti*. Turin, 1990.
- Minor, Andrew C., and Bonner Mitchell. *A Renaissance Entertainment: Festivities for the marriage of Cosimo I, Duke of Florence in 1539*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1968.
- Monson, Craig A. "Families, Convents, Music: The Power of Sisterhood." In *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others*, eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World, 40-52. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- _____. "The Council of Trent Revisited." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55/1 (Spring 2002): 1-37.
- _____. *Disembodied Voices: Music and Culture in an Early Modern Italian Convent*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- _____. "The Making of Lucrezia Orsina Vizzana's *Componimenti Musicali* (1623)." In *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, 297-323. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- Monson, Craig A., ed. *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Montford, Kimberlyn. "L'Anno santo and Female Monastic Churches: The Politics, Business and Music of the Holy Year in Rome (1675)." *The Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 6/1 (2000).

- _____. "Music in the Convents of the Counter-Reformation Rome." Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1999.
- Muir, Edward. *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Muir, Edward, and Guido Ruggiero, eds. *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*. Translated by Margaret A. Gallucci, Mary M. Gallucci, and Carole C. Gallucci. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Nagler, A.M. *Theatre Festivals of the Medici, 1539-1637*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1976.
- Natvig, Mary. "Rich Clares, Poor Clares: Celebrating the Divine Office." *Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 4 (2000): 59-70.
- Nochlin, Linda. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" In *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, eds., Anne C. Herrmann and Abigail J. Stewart, 93-116. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1994.
- O'Malley, John. *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*. Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- O'Regan, Noel. *Institutional Patronage in Post-Tridentine Rome: Music at Santissima Trinita dei Pellegrini, 1550-1650*. Royal Musical Association Monographs no: 7. London: Royal Musical Association, 1995.
- Paliaga, Franco. "L'architettura del Principe, 'Dux e Pius': I 'suntuosi' progetti di Giorgio Vasari per la chiesa dell'Ordine dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano in Pisa." In *The Plume and the Palette*, eds. Pamela Berger, Jeffery Howe, and Susan A. Michalczyk, 129-158. New York, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2001.
- Parisi, Susan, and Colleen Reardon, eds. *Music Observed: Studies in Memory of William C. Holmes*. Detroit Monographs in Musicology/Studies in Music, 42, Warren, MI: Harmonie Park, 2004.
- Pieraccini, Gaetano. *La stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo: saggio di ricerche sulla trasmissione ereditaria dei caratteri biologici*. Florence: Nardini editore, 1986.
- Powers, Katherine. "The Spiritual Madrigal in Counter-Reformation Italy: Definition, Use, and Style." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1997.

- Ranft, Patricia. *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Reardon, Colleen. "The Good Mother, the Reluctant Daughter, and the Convent: A Case of Musical Persuasion." In *Musical Voices of Early Modern Women: Many-Headed Melodies*, ed. Thomasin LaMay, 271-86. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.
- _____. *Holy Concord Within Sacred Walls: Nuns and Music in Siena, 1575-1700*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Riccoboni, Sister Bartolomea. *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent*. Translated by Daniel Bornstein. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Richa, Giuseppe. *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine, divise ne' suoi quartieri*. Firenze: Viviani, 1754-62. Reprinted: Rome: Multigrafica Editrice, 1972. Tomo quarto, Quartiere di Santa Maria Novella: Lezione VIII, "Del Monastero Nuovo Detto della CONCEZIONE" p.110-120.
- Roberts, Ann M. "Chiara Gambacorta of Pisa as Patroness of the Arts." In *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter, and John Coakley, 120-154. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- Roche, Jerome. "Musica diversa di Compieta: Compline and its Music in Seventeenth-Century Italy." *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 109 (1982-83): 60-79.
- Romita, Fiorenzo. *Jus musicae liturgicae*, Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1947.
- Rowley, Harold H. "The Interpretation of the Song of Songs." In *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament*, 191-233. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press 1952; 2d rev. ed. Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1965.
- Saslow, James M. *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as Theatrum Mundi*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Scaraffia, Lucetta, and Gabriella Zarri. *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

- Schutte, Anne Jacobson, Thomas Kuehn, and Sivana Seidel Menchi, eds. *Time, Space and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe*. Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001.
- Shaw, Christine. "Peace-making rituals in fifteenth-century Siena." *Renaissance Studies* 20/2 (April 2006): 225-239.
- Sherr, Richard. *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome and Other Courts*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.
- Solerti, Angelo. *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla Corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637*. New York: B. Blom, 1968.
- Sperling, Jutta Giesela. *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Strasser, Ulrike. "Early Modern Nuns and the Feminist Politics of Religion." *Journal of Religion* 84/4 (October 2004): 529-554.
- Strehlke, Carl Brandon. *Pontormo, Bronzino, and the Medici*. Philadelphia: Museum of Art, 2004.
- Strocchia, Sharon T. "Taken into Custody: Girls and Convent Guardianship in Renaissance Florence." *Renaissance Studies* 17/2 (2003): 177-200.
- _____. "Naming a Nun: Spiritual Exemplars and Corporate Identity in Florentine Convents, 1450-1530." In *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, ed. William J. Connell, 215-240. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.
- _____. "Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence." In *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead, 3-46. New York: Garland, 1999.
- _____. "Funerals and the Politics of Gender in Early Renaissance Florence." In *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel, and Juliana Schiesari, 155-168. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- _____. "Remembering the Family: Women, Kin and Commemorative Masses in Renaissance Florence." *Renaissance Quarterly* 42 (1989): 635-654.

- Tacconi, Marica. *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria Del Fiore*. [Cambridge studies in palaeography and codicology, 12]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Talbot, Michael. "Tenors and Basses at the Venetian Ospedali." *Acta Musicologica* 66/2 (July-December 1994): 123-138.
- Tarabotti, Arcangela. *On Paternal Tyranny*. Translated by Letizia Panizza. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Terpstra, Nicholas. "Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters: Girls and Conservatory Guardianship in Late Renaissance Florence." *Renaissance Studies* 17/2 (2003): 201-229.
- Thomas, Anabel. *Art and Piety in the Female Religious Communities of Renaissance Italy: Iconography, Space, and the Religious Woman's Perspective*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Tomas, Natalie R. *The Medici Women: Gender and Power in Renaissance Florence*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.
- Treadwell, Nina. "Music of the Gods: Solo Song and *effetti meravigliosi* in the Interludes for *La pellegrina*." *Current Musicology* 83 (Spring 2007): 33-84.
- Trexler, Richard C. *Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence*, vol 2, *The Women of Renaissance Florence*. Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993.
- _____. *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*. New York, London: Academic Press, 1980.
- Valone, Carolyn. "Roman Matrons as Patrons: Various Views of the Cloister Wall." In *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson, 49-72. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Vio, Gastone. "I monastery femminili del Seicento: gioie d dolori per I musici veneziani." In *Musica, scienza e idee nella Serenissima durante il Seicento*, eds. Passadore, Francesco, and Franco Rossi, 295-316. Venice: Fondazione Ugo e Olga Levi, 1996.
- Viviani della Robbia, Enrica. *Nei monastery fiorentini*. Florence: Sansoni, 1946.

Weaver, Elissa B. *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

_____. "Suor Maria Clkemente Ruoti, Playwright and Academician." In *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, 281-296. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

_____. "The Convent Wall in Tuscan Convent Drama." In *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson, 73-86. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.

Weaver, Robert Lamar, and Norma Wright Weaver. *A Chronology of Music in the Florentine Theater 1590-1750: Operas, Prologues, Finales, Intermezzos and Plays with Incidental Music*. Detroit Studies in Music Bibliography, No. 38. Detroit: Information Coordinators, Inc., 1978.

Weber, Alison. "Spiritual Administration: Gender and Discernment in the Carmelite Reform." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 31/1, Special Edition: Gender in Early Modern Europe (Spring 2000): 123-146.

Williams, George L. *Papal Genealogy: The Families and Descendants of the Popes*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998.

Wilson, Blake McDowell. *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Wood, Jeryldene M. *Women, Art and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1996.

Woodford, Charlotte. "Women as Historians: The Case of Early Modern German Convents." *German Life and Letters* 52/3 (1999): 271-80.

Wright, Wendy M. "The Visitation of Mary: The First Years, (1610-18)." In *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation: In Honor of John C. Olin on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Richard L. DeMolen, 216-50. New York: Fordham University Press, 1994.

Zarri, Gabriella. *Monaca, moglie, serva, cortigiana: vita e immagine delle donne tra Rinascimento e Controriforma*. Firenze: Morgana, 2001.

_____, ed. *Recinti: donne, clausura e matrimonio nella prima età moderna*. Bologna: Il mulino, 2000.

- _____. "Gender, Religious Institutions and Social Discipline: The Reform of the Regulars." In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, 193-212. London: Longman, 1998.
- _____. *Il Monachesimo femminile in Italia dall'alto Medioevo al secolo 17 a confronto con l'oggi: atti del Convegno del Centro di studi farfensi: Santa Vittoria in Mantenano, 21-24 settembre 1995*. San Pietro in Cariano (Verona): Il segno dei Gabrielli, 1997.
- _____. "Ursula and Catherine: The Marriage of Virgins in the Sixteenth Century." Translated by Anne Jacobson Schutte. In *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley, 237-278. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- _____. *Le sante vive: cultura e religiosità femminile nella prima età moderna*. Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990.
- _____. "Monasteri femminili e città (secoli XV-XVIII)" in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 9: La Chiesa e il potere politico dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, eds. Giorgio Chittolini, and Giovanni Miccoli, 357-429. Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1986.
- Zorzi, Elvira Gabero, and Mario Sperenzi, *Teatro e spettacolo nella Firenze dei Medici: Modelli dei luoghi teatrali*. Florence: Olschki, 2001.

VITA

Katherine Lynn Turner was born in Tucson, Arizona on August 4, 1977, the daughter of Douglas J. Turner and Gayle L. Turner. She graduated from Gar-Field High School in Woodbridge, Virginia in 1995. She attended Baylor University in Waco, Texas for her undergraduate studies and graduated in 2001 with a degree in Music Education. Her graduate education in Musicology was undertaken at the University of Texas in Austin. She completed a Master of Music in 2003 and the Ph.D. with a doctoral portfolio in Women and Gender Studies in 2008.

Permanent Address: 116 Ashewood Commons Drive, Columbia, South Carolina, 29209

This dissertation was typed by the author.